SERMONS

ON VARIOUS

MORAL AND RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS,

FOR

ALL THE SUNDAYS,

And ſome of the Principal

FESTIVALS OF THE YEAR.

BY THE REV. JAMES ARCHER.

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SERMON XXVII.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

On Devotion.

This is the will of God, that, by doing well, you may put to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh men: as free, and not making liberty a cloak for wickedneſs; but as the ſervants of God. 1 Pet. ii. 15.

IN the early days of Chriſtianity, the Chriſtian profeſſion was frequently held up by the children of this world, as an object of cenſure, deriſion, and ſcorn. The Heathens, who were the fooliſh men of whom St. Peter ſpeaks, conſidered Chriſtians as a deluded ſet of peo-

ple, who were wholly taken up with airy ſpeculations of a diſengagement of affection from the things of this lower world; and who were conſequently, from principle, not only unprofitable, but dangerous members of the community, idle citizens, bad ſubjects, and inclined to neglect and deſpiſe every duty of civil and ſocial life.

In each ſucceeding age, the practices of devotion have been expoſed to the like reproaches: and, in theſe days, if a man have the character of a devout and religious man, ſome of his acquaintances, who treat him with moderation, pity his weakneſs and ſimplicity; others ſneer at his manner of life; ſome deſpiſe him as a canting hypocrite, who, by the exterior garb of piety, ſeeks to reap in indolence, thoſe advantages which ſhould be the fruits of honeſt induſtry, and which he ſhould obtain by making himſelf beneficial to his fellow creatures. In ſhort, an opinion ſeems to be prevalent in the world, that to have the cha-

racter of being devout, is the ſame thing as to be accounted ſlothful, ſour, cenſorious, and melancholy.

Theſe reproaches, under which devotion ſuffers, originate chiefly in ignorance or impiety: they are the accuſations of *fooliſh men* who are wedded to the earth, who extend not their views beyond the limits of this tranſitory life, and have no conception of the dignity and happineſs which is conferred on man, in his being admitted to have his *converſation in heaven*, to commune with his Creator by frequent meditation and prayer, and to familiarize himſelf with that world of immortal ſpirits, to which he hopes he ſhall be ſhortly united.

But, although the aſperſions thrown on devotion are generally to be attributed to ignorance or malice, ſtill, my devout friends, do not you flatter yourſelves too much either; for devotion frequently ſuffers in the opinions of men, from the imprudence of thoſe who make profeſſion of it. They, by

their abuſe of it, often render it diſguſting and odious; and thus true devotion is ſtigmatized for the faults and errors of perſons who are mere pretenders to it; faults and errors which it condemns and abhors, and with which it is wholly incompatible.

You will much injure the religion of Jeſus, if your devotion be found blended with theſe errors and weakneſſes. It is by exhibiting piety in all its native beauty, that you are to *put to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh men.* Be, as men that are free, diſengaged from earthly vanity, and dwelling among the things that are above: but, do not make *that liberty a cloak for wickedneſs*; do not imagine, that your devout exerciſes acquit you from the diſcharge of any duty incumbent on you in your ſtate of life, whether as men, as citizens, or as Chriſtians.

As I earneſtly wiſh to guard you againſt any miſtake in this particular, I entreat your attention, while, in the firſt place,

place, I explain to you, as briefly as I ſhall be able, the eſſential properties of true devotion; and, ſecondly, while I point out ſome of the errors and abuſes in the practice of devout exerciſes, which bring upon them the cenſure and the odium of the world.

I. The grand duty of a Chriſtian life, is *to love God above all things*, and with every effort of heart, ſoul, mind, and ſtrength. *This is the greateſt and firſt commandment*, and includes every other. The man who loves God with his whole heart, whatever be his profeſſion, ſituation, or condition, that man is truly devout. Though his ſtate of life be ever ſo incompatible with frequent exterior exerciſes of devotion, no matter: the ſoldier, who, amidſt the din of war, or the tumult and licentiouſneſs of a camp, loves his God with ſincerity and fervour, is more devout, and is a greater ſaint than the ſolitary, the hermit, whoſe love is leſs ardent and ſincere; whereas, if we love any thing more than

God, or if any object of our affections, however innocent in itſelf, be placed upon an equality with him, we can never be devout. No, my brethren, in vain ſhall we multiply our prayers; fruitleſs will be all our faſts and ſelf-denials; though we *ſpeak with the tongues of men and angels;* though we *have all faith*; though our alms-deeds be diſtributed to the indigent with the moſt boundleſs profuſion; yet, if we have not *charity*, we are nothing: we have the outward trappings and ornaments of devotion, but nothing of its ſubſtance: we make a ſhow of leaves and bloſſoms to attract and pleaſe the eye; but the genuine fruits of piety we cannot produce. Man may admire—man, whoſe feeble eye cannot pervade the ſecrets of our ſouls, may admire, extol, and canonize our virtue; but to the ſight of the Searcher of hearts, the myſtery of our iniquity is clearly expoſed, and the Lord rejects our unhallowed offerings with contempt and indignation.

Devotion,

Devotion, therefore, is that habitual diſpoſition of ſoul which is formed by divine love: it commands ſeveral acts of the mind, and excites various emotions in the heart, which all center in the Supreme Being, and tend to divine and immortal objects. The conſtituent parts of devotion are, firſt, a continual ſenſe of the preſence of God; ſecondly, ſentiments of gratitude for his benefits; thirdly, ardent deſires of being inſeparably united to him; and laſtly, a placid reſignation to every appointment of his allwiſe and beneficent providence.

Firſt, a continual ſenſe of the Preſence of God. The devout Chriſtian *ſeeks the face of the Lord evermore*, and walks continually with him. Not only does he think on his God, when employed in determinate acts of worſhip, prayer, and praiſe; but when in company, in his amuſements, amidſt the occupations of the world, and the tumults, cares, and ſolicitudes of life, as well as in the ſilence of retirement, the Divine Being dwells

upon his thoughts. If engaged in the active ſcenes of life, as the greater part of men muſt be, he ſteals aſide into ſolitude, as often as his neceſſary occupations will allow him, that he may open his heart to an undiſturbed and unreſerved communication with his God. It is his delight to preſent himſelf before the throne of God in the aſſembly of the faithful, and to join the ſacrifice of his affections to the ſpotleſs victim which is immolated on our altars. He knows the importance, the excellence, the ſweets, of theſe exerciſes. But, if Providence hath marked out for him a train of duties not conſiſtent with the frequency of theſe holy occupations, ſtill he does not repine; he every where finds his God: no place, no object, can exclude him whoſe immenſity fills the heavens and the earth. If the days of a devout Chriſtian be filled up with labour and drudgery, he labours under the eye, and with the approbation, of the great Ruler of the Univerſe, and expects the fruits of induſtry

duſtry from his bleſſing. When he lays him down to ſleep, he reclines on the boſom of his goodneſs, and repoſes in the arms of his protection: when he takes his food, he receives it from that Being *who openeth his hand, and filleth with bleſſing every living creature.* On all the works of nature around him, he diſcerns the impreſſion of the hand of God.—Whatever he beholds on earth, that is beautiful or fair, great or good, he refers to God as to the author of every excellence. From the ſmall ſtreams of goodneſs by which he is here refreſhed and comforted, he aſcends in thought to the fountain whence they flow.

Hence proceeds that gratitude to the Almighty for his innumerable benefits, which is another quality of true devotion. When the devout man beholds that boundleſs munificence with which the great Giver of all good gifts diſpenſes his favours to the inhabitants of the earth, and particularly, when he reflects on the inſtances of divine goodneſs which he has

himſelf experienced, his heart glows within him. He reviews, from time to time, the events of his paſt life, and, in every comfort which he has received, bleſſes the goodneſs of heaven. If he call to mind the tender affection with which his parents reared him up, and ſupplied his infant wants, and the prudent care which watched over his education; if he look round him on the comforts which he now enjoys; if he be bleſſed with a riſing offspring ſmiling around him, with a family where all is peace and joy; if he taſte the ſweets of friendſhip, of ſociety, or poſſeſs any thing deſirable upon earth; he refers all with gratitude to the bounty of his Creator. But above all, when he looks forwards to that immortality which awaits him; when he remembers the precious blood which was ſpilt to purchaſe it; when he reflects, that once a loſt and ruined creature, he has been raiſed from the duſt, and invited to take his ſeat among the Princes of heaven: oh! then his heart overflows

with

with thankfulneſs; then he ſings with the Royal Prophet: *What ſhall I render to the Lord, for all the things that he hath rendered to me? Bleſs the Lord, O my ſoul; and let all that is within me praiſe his holy name ....who forgiveth all thy iniquities; who healeth all thy diſeaſes; who redeemeth thy life from deſtruction; who crowneth thee with mercy and compaſſion.*

The proſpect into the regions of future bliſs, which awakens all his gratitude, creates in him likewiſe thoſe ardent deſires of an union with his ſovereign good, and that placid reſignation under the preſſure of earthly calamity, which I mentioned as the other ingredients of devotion. His longings after immortality are beautifully expreſſed by the Pſalmiſt in various parts of his ſacred Canticles. *As the heart panteth after the fountains of waters, ſo my ſoul panteth after thee, O God. My ſoul hath thirſted after the ſtrong, living God; when ſhall I come and appear before the face of God? How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hoſts!*

My ſoul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord. While thus he dwells in deſire among the good things that are above, his thoughts are ennobled, his views enlarged; he is raiſed above all the viciſſitudes and uncertainties of this life, and, in the ſame proportion as he deſpiſes its enjoyments, he is armed againſt all its evils. In every event he adores the divine will. No anxious cares diſturb his quiet, no murmuring thoughts find admiſſion to his breaſt.—He lays all his hopes and fears, his deſigns, projects, cares, uneaſineſſes, and troubles, at the feet of his Lord, and reſts ſecurely under the ſhadow of his wings.

Having thus explained to you the nature of devotion, I may confidently aſk you: Is there any thing in devotion, as thus deſcribed, which ſeems little, deſpicable, or mean; any thing which a rational being can find grounds to ridicule? Is it not rather the nobleſt, and, at the ſame time, the moſt delightful of all the exer-

exercises of our mental faculties? It originates in affections which are congenial to our very nature. Surely we were formed to admire what is excellent, and to love what is amiable. Those who, when they behold the expression of devotion in the countenance and in the gestures of the servants of God, affect to sneer and ridicule, or call it weakness, grimace, and bigotry, would be ashamed not to seem affected by objects much inferior to those which devotion has in view. They are ever ready to express, even in terms of adoration, their devotion to a frail and perishable beauty: they cannot behold the magnificent prospects and beautiful scenes of nature, without feeling and expressing an awe mixed with delight. The tenderness of an affectionate parent, the generosity of a friend, any action in which virtue is eminently conspicuous, or even the representation of such an action on the mimic stage, softens the heart to tenderness, and bedews the countenance with tears.—

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Were men to declare themſelves unmoved by ſuch objects, the world would deſpiſe them as wretches, whoſe hearts were odiouſly hardened and depraved. Oh! thou deluded man, is gratitude, is love, is deſire then only to be contemned when it terminates in infinite goodneſs, wiſdom, and beauty? Shall thoſe feelings, which are ſo graceful on other and trifling occaſions, then only be ridiculed when they are excited by the ſource of every excellence? Why were our hearts gifted with theſe generous affections, but that they might tend to him from whom we received them?

Chriſtians, the man who has no reliſh for devotion, is indeed a wretched being. He lives without God in this world: and what is man when ſeparated from his God! Alas! he is the ſlave of every furious paſſion, the ſport of every contingency, ever in purſuit of a phantom of happineſs, which, as he advances towards it, eludes his eagerneſs, and retires ſtill farther from him, till death arreſt him in

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his mid-career, and uſher him into a new ſcene of unutterable miſery. There ends the vain felicity of the man who is not united to his ſovereign good by the exerciſes of Chriſtian piety. Truly, my beloved friends, devotion is at once the higheſt privilege and moſt exquiſite enjoyment of our being: it calms our paſſions; heals all the wounds, and alleviates all the diſtreſſes of our ſouls; it is a ſanctuary ever open to the miſerable; it imparts ſweets and comforts with equal bounty to all who have recourſe to it; it begins on earth the occupations of the angels and bleſſed ſpirits, who, in the plenitude of bliſs, delight to exerciſe their devotion *to him that ſitteth on the throne, and to the lamb,* for ever and ever.

I have ſhown you of what devotion conſiſts, and touched upon its advantages. I proceed now to take notice of ſome errors in the practice of it, which disfigure its genuine beauty.

II. In

II. In the firſt place, to uſe the words of a late venerable Prelate, " Beware of " the error of thoſe falſe devouts, who " make all devotion conſiſt in certain " external practices, deſtitute of the in- " ternal ſpirit; or in huddling over a " number of prayers; or in frequent " faſtings, diſciplines, or hair-ſhirts; or " in giving alms; or in frequenting the " ſacraments; or in following ſome other " religious practices, which happen to " be agreeable to their inclinations: " though they remain all the while un- " mortified in their paſſions, full of ſelf- " love, and void of all true charity, " either to God or their neighbours. " Theſe practices," continues this great maſter of a ſpiritual life, " are often the " attendants of true devotion, or its ef- " fects: but then devotion does not con- " ſiſt in any of them; and they may be " often found in ſuch as have no true " devotion, no true charity, nor even " true faith, without which no one can " pleaſe God."

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In effect, prayer and praiſe, and all the devout exerciſes enjoined by the Chriſtian religion, are the means appointed for raiſing our hearts to the Supreme Being. They are the ſigns of devotion, the language in which it naturally expreſſes itſelf. But then we muſt remember, that they are ſigns and expreſſions only: and we all know, that, in a variety of inſtances, our expreſſions may not be the image of what paſſes in our ſouls. It is in the diſpoſition of the heart, I repeat it, and not in the motion of the lips, the compoſure of the countenance, or the poſture of the body, that devotion is centered. The heart may pray, and often does pray, when no words are uttered. But if the heart be unconcerned or ill-affected, all words, however in themſelves expreſſive and ardent, are in the ear of the Almighty but ſo many empty and unacceptable ſounds.

It is likewiſe an error to conceive, that devotion requires an entire retreat from the world, and from worldly concerns;

cerns; or, that the exerciſes of it are any hindrance to that honeſt induſtry, by which the generality of men are bound to provide for themſelves, and thoſe who depend on them, the neceſſaries, conveniences, and comforts of life. You muſt have obſerved from what I have already ſaid, that devotion is not ſo properly any particular act, as a ſpirit which is to animate and dignify all our actions. There are perſons whom the Spirit of God calls into ſolitude, that there they may, without interruption, contemplate and adore his wonders and his mercies: and with them we hold communication. They, from their peaceful harbours, beholding the ſtorms and tempeſts by which we are aſſailed on the perilous ocean of life—beholding us ſtruggling with temptations, overwhelmed by tribulation, ſurrounded by dangers, commiſerate our condition, and ſend up ſighs for our ſafety, which are wafted to the throne of God. They are appointed by heaven to carry on, in our name, the work of prayer and praiſe,

which

which our employments ſo frequently oblige us to interrupt. We ſhare in their merits and virtues: but it is evident, from the conſtitution of our being, and from our common wants and neceſſities, that the generality of mankind were deſigned by Providence for an active part in the world. Should you, therefore, my friends—you, who have ſo many other duties to diſcharge—you, who have a buſineſs to attend to, obligations of ſociety, friendſhip, and civility, to comply with—ſhould you neglect theſe duties, that you may practiſe the devout exerciſes of a retired life, it would not be devotion; it would be a dangerous illuſion. For a woman to neglect her domeſtic concerns, the attention which ſhe owes to her huſband, or any of the various duties which fall within her ſphere, that ſhe may have time to remain in the Church, is not devotion. Such conduct cannot pleaſe God: he will have obedience rather than ſacrifice. Beſides, my beloved, there is often much of ſelf-love

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in this attachment to devout exercises. Persons frequently multiply their prayers and meditations, because they taste in them a sensible pleasure, and find them more favourable to their indolence, than the more humble and painful occupations of their state: and such religion is vain.

Those likewise mistake the nature of devotion, who consider it as a gloomy and melancholy temper of mind, which looks with an indignant eye on all that is pleasing or amusing in life. It is quite otherwise, my brethren; devotion is ever easy and cheerful. Most certainly the devout man abstains from every unlawful pleasure: he checks also every intemperate fondness for pleasures which in themselves are innocent, but which, if pursued too eagerly, may enervate his mind, or divert his attention from more important occupations. In a word, devotion will not suffer amusement to be our principal object; but readily allows that share of it which is requisite to relaxation of mind and body, and to the relieving

lieving of the heart from its cares. It admits likewiſe, and recommends, a decent conformity of dreſs and manners, according to our reſpective ſituations in life, with the eſtabliſhed cuſtoms and faſhions of the age in which we live, provided they be conſiſtent with purity and innocence. Do not think, my beloved, that in religion all is ſorrow and dejection. Quite the contrary. Thoſe do a material injury to religion, who preſent it under an unpleaſing and forbidding form. By clothing it with unneceſſary auſterity, they diſfigure its natural features, and do away all its enchanting graces; they terrify weak minds, and deter them from embracing it: whereas there is nothing in the ſpirit of religion, which is adverſe to a cheerful enjoyment of our ſituation in the world.

It is alſo a miſtaken notion, to believe that devotion nouriſhes a ſpirit of ſeverity in judging of the manners and characters of others. Devotion has long been injured by this reproach, inſomuch that,

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as I have already obſerved, to have the character of being devout, and to paſs for cenſorious, and fond of detraction, appears to many perſons to be nearly the ſame thing. I know not whether perſons given to devotion, are, in reality, more addicted to this ſnarling and uncharitableneſs than other people. But this I know, if they be cenſorious, it is not true devotion that makes them ſo. Its firſt principle is univerſal benevolence. Candour, meekneſs, and humility, are ever its attendants. It is gentle, liberal, generous, and unaſſuming. Severe to itſelf only, it makes to others every allowance which humanity can ſuggeſt. If your devotion be not accompanied with theſe amiable qualities; if it embitter your ſentiments, or infuſe acrimony into your language; depend upon it, ſome evil paſſion yet lurks in your hearts.

Be careful, therefore, henceforth to remove from your devotion theſe defects, and every other defect. Give that dig-

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nity to true piety, and labour to procure for it that eſteem, to which it is juſtly entitled. Thus you will put to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh men: thus you will gain your neighbour to Chriſt Jeſus, and find your own hearts enlarged in the ſervice of God. Exterior practices of devotion will prove greatly beneficial in exciting the devout affections of the heart; and theſe, in their turn, will make thoſe prayers, auſterities, and labours, ſweet and pleaſant, which, without the pious feelings of the ſoul, muſt ever be heavy and diſtaſteful. Beg daily of the Spirit of God to give you this true devotion: for it muſt be his gift. From him it proceeds, to him it tends, and will then be made perfect, when you ſhall be admitted to exerciſe it without impediment in his eternal kingdom.

SERMON

SERMON XXVIII.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

On the Injuſtice of the Aſperſions thrown on Devotion.

So is the will of God, that, by doing well, you may put to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh men: as free, and not as making liberty a cloak for wickedneſs; but as the ſervants of God. 1 Pet. ii. 15.

I OBSERVED to you laſt Sunday, that devotion is much injured in the opinion of the world, by the errors and weakneſſes of ſome who make profeſſion of it: and, that it may appear to man in its native beauty and lovelineſs, I endeavoured to point out its diſtinguiſhing properties, and to guard you againſt thoſe miſtakes by which its excellence

may be any way diminiſhed. But, as there are other aſperſions thrown on devotion, aſperſions that originate in ignorance or impiety, to theſe, likewiſe, it will be proper to give an attentive conſideration.

Truly, my devout friends, be your piety ever ſo enlightened, pure, and fervent, you will not always eſcape the cenſure and deriſion of *fooliſh men*. *All that will live godly in Chriſt Jeſus ſhall ſuffer perſecution.* No ſooner does a perſon make open profeſſion of piety, but the malicious tongues of the children of this world are armed againſt him. Yes, in an age when the diſorders, the ſcandals, and criminal exceſſes, which every where abound, might furniſh, one would think, ſufficient objects for ſatire and reproach; nothing is more expoſed to ridicule, nothing treated with leſs indulgence, than religion and virtue.

Perhaps, from unbelievers ſuch behaviour might naturally be expected: but,

alas! we frequently find that Chriſtians likewiſe take a malignant pleaſure in depreciating and deriding the piety of their fellow members in Chriſt Jeſus. When they ſee a neighbour aſſiduous in every exerciſe of a Chriſtian life, nothing in his conduct is allowed to paſs uncenſured. If he unbend his mind by innocent amuſements; if he endeavour to give to virtue a cheerful and pleaſing countenance; if he conform to the manners of the times in things of their own nature innocent or indifferent; it is ſaid, that he loves his own eaſe; that, with all his piety, he has his enjoyments, he has his appetites, and indulges them too. If he be auſtere in his manners; if he hold little commerce with the world, and taſte few of its ſatisfactions; oh! then, ſuch virtue as that—they have no notion of it: it is ſufficient, they ſay, to frighten people from practiſing ſo gloomy and moroſe a diſcipline. If the conduct of thoſe who are addicted to the practices of piety give no handle to either of theſe reproaches,

reproaches, at leaſt their intentions are brought under ſuſpicion: it is ſaid they have their end in it; they would not live thus, but with a view to ſome advantage. Such, ſo unjuſt and inhuman are the judgements frequently paſſed by mankind on the ſervants of God.

I therefore undertake, this day, to plead their cauſe, and ſhall ſet before you the iniquity and abſurdity of theſe cenſures and judgements, which are ſo diſgraceful to religion, ſo injurious to the Spirit of God, the author of all piety, and cauſe ſo much ſcandal in the Chriſtian world. Firſt, the iniquity of thoſe judgements which are paſſed on the intentions of devout people, by proving them to be raſh and unjuſt. Secondly, the abſurdity of the complaints thrown out againſt the virtues of God's ſervants, as too indulgent or too ſevere; by ſhowing you, that thoſe who thus complain and cenſure, are in perpetual contradiction with themſelves.

I. Nothing upon earth is ſo truly deſerving of our reſpect and eſteem, nothing ſo great, exalted, and noble, as true piety. The world, corrupt as it is, will not diſpute its excellence. Elevated ſentiments, generous principles of action, the command of the paſſions, patience in adverſity, meekneſs in receiving injurious treatment, courage in repelling danger, fortitude in bearing up under difficulties and afflictions, temperance in the gratification of ſenſual inclinations, fidelity in the diſcharge of every obligation, evenneſs of ſoul in the various events of life, are ſo many qualities which muſt excite admiration, and command eſteem and love. The Pagan philoſophers, from the combination of all theſe qualities in the ſame human being, formed the fancied image of their truly wiſe and perfect man. But they exiſt in reality, only in the diſciples of Chriſt Jeſus. Nor can it be denied, that thoſe perſons, in whom ſuch qualities are eminently conſpicuous, ſhould

riſe in our eſteem in proportion as the morals of the age are more diſſolute and licentious: ſince the virtue which is untainted in the midſt of contagion, which ſtands collected in itſelf againſt all the ſcoffs of impiety, and braves all the violence of oppoſition, is evidently more noble, generous, and heroic, than that which is countenanced by the ſmiles of the world, upheld by general approbation, foſtered by example, and ſheltered in ſecurity.

But, notwithſtanding that men in general profeſs a reſpect for virtue in the abſtract, nothing is more common than to ſee them undervalue and depreciate thoſe who practiſe it. While they allow that nothing is more eſtimable than ſincere and ſolid piety, they ſeem to imagine that it is no where to be found; and make the declaration of loving and honouring an imaginary form of ſanctity which they have conceived in their minds, a pretext for cenſuring and condemning

thoſe in whom the appearances of ſanctity are moſt diſcernible.

This malice of the children of this world againſt the diſciples of Chriſt Jeſus is moſt ſucceſsfully pointed at their intentions. Sometimes it is hinted, that thoſe who appear the moſt religious have probably no advantage over others, but that of cunning and hypocriſy. When a ſinner is converted from the evil of his ways, it is remarked, that the change in his conduct may not originate in any change in the diſpoſitions of his heart, but either in the infirmities of age, a ſatiety of former criminal pleaſures, or inability to renew them. Zeal in promoting the public inſtitutions of benevolence, is conſtrued into an ambition of diſtinction and conſequence. An attachment in the ſofter ſex to the exerciſes of devotion, is whiſpered to be only a conſolation for the deficiency or for the fading of perſonal charms, or the reſource of neglected virginity. It is thus that the merit of the beſt actions is depreciated,

depreciated, and the intentions of the moſt virtuous among men are vilified and blackened by unjuſt and cruel ſuſpicions and judgements.

I ſay, unjuſt and cruel: for it is evident, that the judgement of the thoughts and intentions of men belongs to God only. He is preſent to the inmoſt receſſes of the ſoul of each individual: to his piercing eye all is viſible and naked: he only is acquainted with the ſecrets of all hearts. But to us they will not be revealed, till the great day of final retribution, when the light ſhall ſhine forth in darkneſs. An impenetrable veil is now thrown over the operations, views, and deſigns, of the human heart; and we muſt wait till that veil be drawn aſide, before we can be authorized to paſs a judgement on the merit or demerit of other men's actions: till then it is beyond the reach of our knowledge, and, conſequently, beyond the limits of our judgement.

Suſpicions, which do not amount to a decided opinion, may, perhaps, be thought more juſtifiable: but no, they are equally oppoſite to every principle of charity and juſtice. Even when the conduct of our brethren appears in an unfavourable light, charity makes the friendly and benevolent ſuppoſition, that they are not ſo bad as appearances indicate; that ſome latent circumſtance rectifies and excuſes their behaviour. If their actions are inconteſtably unjuſtifiable, a charitable heart will hope, if poſſible, that the intention will be found to have been innocent: and when no ſuppoſition can excuſe or extenuate the guilt, it will weep in ſilence over the misfortunes of a brother in Chriſt Jeſus. Oh! my brethren, if charity ſhould make us mild and indulgent, even to the errors and vices of our fellow-creatures, how little of its ſpirit do we poſſeſs, when we are ſevere, even in the opinion which we form of their virtues!

Moreover,

Moreover, even if charity be forgotten, the injuſtice of ſuch opinions is glaringly conſpicuous. You cannot but be ſenſible, my brethren, that to ſuſpect men of diſſimulation, of hypocriſy, of making piety, religion, and every thing which is moſt ſacred, the inſtruments of their paſſions, or intereſted deſigns; to ſuſpect them of making a mockery both of God and man, is a ſuſpicion of a moſt ſerious and grievous nature; a ſuſpicion not to be cheriſhed, or even hearkened to for a moment, without the moſt evident and weighty motives: nor are you ignorant, that the ſmalleſt ſuſpicion injurious to our neighbour can never be harboured without injuſtice, unleſs it be built on very rational grounds. If, therefore, you ſuſpect the motives of people apparently virtuous, on what are your ſuſpicions founded? Are they founded on the very appearances of virtue which you obſerve in them? Is it, becauſe you behold them temperate, chaſte, prudent, mortified? Is it, be-

cauſe they are more aſſiduous in the holy exerciſes of prayer and meditation, more regular in the participation of the Sacraments, than you chuſe to be? Is it on theſe accounts, that you ſuſpect them of hypocriſy? If ſo, your ſuſpicions, inſtead of being built on any rational foundation, are only ſo many evident proofs of the corruption of your own hearts. The man, who is conſcious to himſelf, that he poſſeſſes no true and ſolid virtue, and that the good qualities for which he is commended, though fair to the eye, are at the root vitiated and corrupted, eaſily concludes, that there is no virtue on the earth, and that the appearances of goodneſs in other men are all but cheat and impoſture.

But you will ſay, that you have ſeen many hypocrites; that you have known, and know at this time, perſons who have ſo groſsly impoſed upon the world, as to be eſteemed and venerated as friends of God, and zealous in promoting his honour, while they were ſlaves of the

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moſt corrupt and abandoned paſſions. It is true, my brethren, there are hypocrites: and I readily allow, that a hypocrite deſerves to be execrated both by God and man. Deriſion and ridicule are much too mild, too gentle a puniſhment for a crime ſo atrocious as hypocriſy. The diſcovery of it ſhould rather draw tears of grief and indignation from our eyes, than excite our laughter and raillery. But, if there are hypocrites in the world, what concluſion do you draw from that circumſtance? That all who ſeem pious and religious, reſemble them? Surely not! ſuch a conſequence would be ſhocking: and if you applied the ſame mode of reaſoning to all other people in the world, you would be forced to conclude, that there is no juſtice or common honeſty among men. So many married perſons have been unfaithful to each other: are therefore modeſty and fidelity no more to be found in thoſe who are engaged in the ſacred and honourable bands of wedlock? So many

magiſtrates and judges have yielded to the influence of bribery or human reſpects: is integrity, therefore, baniſhed from our courts of juſtice? The conſequence, in every other caſe, is treated with contempt: how then can it be admiſſible, when drawn againſt piety? The treaſon of Judas does not make you ſuſpect that all the Apoſtles were traitors. The hypocriſy of Simon Magus is no argument that the other diſciples who embraced the Chriſtian faith, were actuated by the ſame ſelfiſh and unworthy motives. *It muſt needs be*, ſaith our Divine Redeemer, *that ſcandals come; but nevertheleſs, woe to that man by whom the ſcandal cometh.* Vice has often clothed herſelf in the habit of virtue. The princes of darkneſs can transform themſelves into angels of light. The paſſions which leave no means untried that can facilitate the attainment of their object, ſometimes call in the ſhow of piety to their aſſiſtance. But nothing can be more abſurd and unjuſt, than to blame piety for the impious

pious uſe that is made of it, or to pretend, that the abuſes which you may have diſcovered in a holy ſtate of life are a reflection on all thoſe who have embraced it. Ah! my brethren, we are in general ſo ready to cenſure virtue—why? becauſe, virtue and our conduct are in perpetual oppoſition.

But you have been ſo often impoſed upon: ſuppoſe it; if you ſhould be deceived in the judgement which you paſs on ſome men, becauſe you are not fond of ſuſpecting them; if you ſhould give to a counterfeit virtue that eſteem and honour which are due only to true and ſterling merit; what great harm would come of it? What alarming and terrible conſequences would follow? Why theſe: in being thus deceived, you will have judged according to the direction of charity, which thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth in the appearances of good: you will have been guided by principles of juſtice, which is incapable of treating others with more harſhneſs

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than it would be itſelf content to be treated with by them: your judgement will have been dictated by prudence, which judges only of that which comes within the ſphere of its knowledge, and refers the thoughts and intentions of men to a higher and infaillible tribunal. And in a miſtake like this, what is there ſo terrible? It is glorious to be deceived, when humanity and tender indulgence to others is the occaſion of the deception. Such miſtakes as theſe do honor to human nature. Only perſons of generous and elevated ſentiments are capable of being thus deceived. See whether your exceſſive caution in ſuſpecting, and ſeverity in condemning your fellow-creatures on the moſt trivial pretext, be not a convincing proof that you have true charity, and every laudable diſpoſition yet to acquire.

II. In the ſecond place: thoſe who criticiſe and cenſure the conduct of others, who are more addicted to the practices of piety than themſelves, uſually fall

fall into perpetual contradictions and the ſtrangeſt inconſiſtencies. You ſhall be judges of it yourſelves. They ſometimes ſay: " ſuch a perſon, with all his devotion, is very tenacious of his own rights, very careful of his own intereſts: ſuch a one's virtue is of ſo delicate a nature, that the leaſt contradiction, the ſlighteſt injury or affront, hurts him very ſenſibly. One is very unforgiving; another fond of applauſe; another lives in a very comfortable ſtyle, and enjoys every convenience and delicacy of life: ſuch a woman, to be ſure, frequents the ſacraments, and is very exact in her hours of prayer, but, at the ſame time, ſo full of ill-humour and caprice, of ſuch a ſnarling and peeviſh diſpoſition, that ſhe makes every body about her unhappy: ſuch an one"—But you know well the reflections generally thrown out, and it would be loſing time to enumerate them all. However, from theſe, and ſuch-like obſervations, a concluſion is very confidently drawn, that piety, accom-

panied with ſuch defects, is an object of cenſure or ridicule. Now, my brethren, pleaſe to obſerve who they are that in general hold this language. Why, they are people who have all the defects which they cenſure in devout perſons, and a great many others of a more grievous nature, without any of their good qualities. When theſe people, who ſo frequently blame the conduct of others, who are much better than themſelves, are told by the Miniſters of the Goſpel, that the diſſipated, ſenſual, worldly, and profane life which they lead, is ſurely not confined within that narrow path which terminates in life eternal, they will not liſten to ſuch doctrine: they ſay, "the Preacher is hard, is too ſevere: he winds up the laws of the Goſpel to too high a pitch: for their parts, they think they do ſufficient for the ſalvation of their ſouls."—O ye equitable and impartial judges! you condemn the devout ſervants of God, becauſe their piety is accompanied with ſome of the

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leaſt of your defects: becauſe to ſome of your weakneſſes they unite a number of good works: you condemn them, and imagine yourſelves to be in the way of ſalvation, while you have all their faults, and ten thouſand more, and perhaps none, not even the ſmalleſt of their virtues.

Nor is this the only inſtance of glaring inconſiſtence; you do not ſeem to have yet determined with yourſelves, what it is you condemn in devout people. If thoſe who declare themſelves ſervants of God, break with the world entirely, live in continual ſolitude, devote their days to meditation, prayer, and exerciſes of ſelf-denial, oh then! you cry out, "this is carrying matters too far; this zeal is certainly not according to knowledge: ſuch piety as that, we have no notion of it: If all people were like them, what would become of the world, of civil ſociety? To be virtuous, there is no need of ſo much ſingularity: true devotion performs every duty of the

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ſtation in which Divine Providence hath placed us." Very well. But now, on the other hand; if the juſt unite their devotion to the obligations they owe to the world; if they ſtrive to make themſelves agreeable and pleaſing to others, by an attention to the forms of civility and poliſhed life; if they partake of the innocent amuſements of the world with apparent pleaſure; then you ſay, "their devotion ſits very eaſy upon them: at this rate, it is not very difficult to be a Saint; if nothing more be required, you could be Saints yourſelves." How then muſt virtue contrive to conciliate your favour; ſince, whether it ſhow itſelf with a ſevere or indulgent aſpect, it is ſure to be equally cenſured?

The obſervations of the Jews on the conduct of our divine Lord and that of his Precurſor were exactly ſimilar. When St. John the Baptiſt appeared in the deſert, clothed with camel's hair, *neither eating bread nor drinking wine*, (Luxe vii.) but exhibiting a ſpectacle of the moſt auſtere

auſtere virtue, they ſaid, *He hath a devil* that puſhes him on to theſe exceſſes. When Jeſus came, *eating and drinking*, and propoſing a degree of virtue more compatible with human weakneſs, in a common and ſimple manner of life which all could imitate, he too did not eſcape their reproaches: *Behold*, ſaid they, *a man that is a glutton, and a drinker of wine, a friend of publicans and ſinners.* Be conſiſtent with yourſelves, my brethren. You are angry if devout people do not conform to your manners; and if they do, you undervalue and blame them on that very account.

From the reflexions which we have this day made, we may eaſily conclude, that piety, though it be found accompanied by human weakneſſes, will certainly command the eſteem and reſpect of every wiſe and good man. If therefore, my friends, if we are not diſtinguiſhed for piety ourſelves, let us, at leaſt, have candour enough to acknowledge

ledge the merits of thoſe who are; let us behold their good works with an holy envy, and wiſh to become like unto them. We ſhould conſider the ſcoffs and deriſions to which devotion is ſo frequently expoſed, as ſo many inſults offered to the Holy Ghoſt, the author and inſpirer of all piety and goodneſs. It is our intereſt to imitate whatever is eſtimable in the conduct of devout men, to copy after their virtues, and, inſtead of cenſuring their faults, to turn our eyes inwardly upon ourſelves, and ſhed tears of compunction over our own crimes and miſeries.

And you, my devout friends, knowing that your defects are much more ſeverely cenſured than thoſe of others, be more on your guard: place yourſelves above the unworthy inſinuations of malignant or fooliſh men, by giving no real occaſion to them: *as free, and not as making liberty a cloak for wickedneſs; but as the ſervants of God.* Let not your piety be directed towards any

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temporal intereſt: let it not be ſullied by caprice, humour, nor peeviſhneſs, nor be found united to an unprofitable and idle life. Make the precepts of religion the rule of all your actions, and its pious exerciſes the reparation of your paſt crimes, the path to heaven, and the price of a happy eternity.

SERMON

SERMON XXIX.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

On the Neceſſity and Advantages of Prayer.

Amen, amen, I ſay to you: if you aſk the Father any thing in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto you have not aſked any thing in my name: aſk and you ſhall receive, that your joy may be full. John xvi. 23.

HOW comfortable are the ideas which preſent themſelves to our minds, when we conſider the kind import of theſe words of our Redeemer which I have juſt repeated! How conſoling is the reflection, that our dependence is upon a Being, whoſe goodneſs and mercies ſurpaſs all comprehenſion; who ap-

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pears more ſenſibly touched at the view of our miſeries, than we are ourſelves! Yes, my Chriſtian friends, dearly as we love ourſelves and our own intereſts, the Lord ſtill loves us with a more tender affection: he invites, he urges, he preſſes us without ceaſing, to have recourſe to the throne of grace, to the fountain of goodneſs, that all our wants may be ſupplied, our miſeries alleviated, our infirmities healed. Oh! adorable Jeſus, it was not enough for thy love to have already aſſured us, that, if we aſked, we ſhould receive; if we ſought, we ſhould find; if we knocked, it ſhould be opened unto us; but, when about to retire from this world, and taking a laſt farewell of thy diſciples, thou wouldſt repeat, in ſtill more engaging terms, the ſame comfortable aſſurance.

Are you ſenſible, my brethren, to this goodneſs of your Redeemer? Where is the creditor that will preſs his debtors to aſk for a remiſſion of their debts, with a declaration that he will

will grant their requeſt? Where is the judge who will ſay to the criminals brought before him: Aſk; and I will take off your chains, and give you liberty? Where is the rich man that urges and entreats the indigent to apply to him for relief? Say, my poor friends, have you often met with ſuch an one? No: ſuch goodneſs as that, is the working of infinite compaſſion and love.

And yet, notwithſtanding theſe tender ſolicitations, theſe loving entreaties of your Redeemer, tell me, in your wants and neceſſities, in your infirmities and pains, in your troubles and diſtreſſes of body or mind; when fortune frowns upon you, when adverſity preſents its lowering aſpect, when tribulations ſurround you, when nature and the elements ſeem to be armed againſt your proſperity and peace; is it to Jeſus, or to the world, that you generally have recourſe for ſuccour? Ah! perhaps he may yet reproach you, as he did his diſciples:

ciples: *Hitherto you have not aſked any thing in my name.*

Truly, if you be not blind to your own deareſt intereſts, prayer will ever be your joy in proſperity, and your relief and conſolation in diſtreſs. A Chriſtian is eſſentially a man of prayer: to converſe with heaven, is the darling occupation of his life. The Church of Chriſt, in this ſtate of earthly baniſhment, expreſſes, without intermiſſion, in plaintive accents, her longings after immortality, and diſtinguiſhes her children by the ardent ſighs which they continually ſend up towards their celeſtial inheritance.

That it may be henceforth your delight to open your hearts to a continual communication with Heaven by the holy exerciſes of prayer, I mean to endeavour this day to give you a clear conviction, firſt, of the obligation of prayer, as grounded on the relation in which we ſtand to the Supreme Being: ſecondly, of the neceſſity and advantages of prayer,

as flowing from our numerous wants and infirmities: and laſtly, I ſhall ſay ſomething on the facility with which you may acquit yourſelves of this important and comfortable duty.

I. The obligation of prayer is founded on the very nature of our ſituation, as men and as Chriſtians.—As men, we are the work of God's almighty hand. By his creative word we were called from our original nothing into our preſent exiſtence. His all-ſupporting arm upholds, each moment, the being which he hath beſtowed upon us: did he withdraw from us his protection, that inſtant our lives would be diſſolved, and we ſhould be blotted out from among the works of the creation. Moreover, in every bleſſing which we participate, in every comfort that we enjoy, we experience freſh inſtances of his liberality. All the ſweets and pleaſures which we taſte on earth, are ſo many ſtreams of goodneſs from the fountain of bliſs, that

that flow through the vale of life for our ſolace and refreſhment.

Conſidering ourſelves therefore as men in our natural condition, and viewing the bleſſings accumulated around us, we muſt feel, that prayer, which is the raiſing up of our minds to the great Giver of all good gifts, is our grand and moſt eſſential obligation. Shall creatures thus favoured, thus diſtinguiſhed, be ever allowed to forget their Benefactor! Shall man, who, in every breath of air, receives a new favour from the Creator, be ever unmindful of the Author of all his happineſs! Can there be an inſtant of our lives, in which the ſovereign Lord of the univerſe doth not juſtly claim our homage and adoration! Surely, were all the moments which ſucceed each other in the period of our exiſtence, wholly occupied by prayer and praiſe, the tribute would not be too great: it would be, after all, but a mean return for mercies unmerited and infinite.

But our Redemption through Chriſt Jeſus has crowned all the mercies of God to his creatures; has raiſed us from the extremity of miſery; delivered us from the tyranny of ſin and death; given us free acceſs to life, to light, to grace, to glory; exalted us to the ſublime pre-eminence of adopted children of God, and heirs of immortality. —Here a new proſpect is opened before us. Our nature indeed, even in its degraded and fallen ſtate, preſerved ſtill ſome of the beautiful traits which were in the beginning impreſſed upon it by the hand of the Creator. Its auguſt ruins bore teſtimony to its former magnificence. We could diſcover in them the plan of an edifice, which was deſigned to be an ornament of nature for endleſs ages. The vaſt deſires of the human heart, which, after trying the whole rage of created objects, could reſt in none of them, in none could taſte any complete ſatisfaction, proclaimed the excellence of its deſtination.

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But Revelation has thrown a new and brighter evidence on theſe conſoling truths; has cauſed the dawn of that light which is yet inacceſſible, to ſhed its beams on the minds of the diſciples of Jeſus, and gladden their hearts; has opened the eyes of mortal men to behold the regions of immortal bliſs, and invites them to aſpire to the participation of infinite joys and glories. A true Chriſtian therefore is a citizen of heaven; all his projects and labours terminate in the ſecuring of a permanent poſſeſſion in the kingdom of Jeſus; his eye is ever turned towards the bleſſed Jeruſalem; his heart continually pants after its enjoyments. And what is the ſentiment of theſe affections, but the exerciſe of prayer? In prayer, our faith dwells among divine and immortal objects: in prayer, hope draws, as it were, near to them, lays hold of them, and makes them its own; in prayer we exert that noble power of love with which our hearts are actuated,

by fervent aſpirations towards theſe exquiſite delights; awaiting, with longing expectation, the riſing of that auſpicious day, when we ſhall no longer be ſubjected to the viciſſitudes of human things, but be diſſolved, and be with Chriſt in the plenitude of unalterable felicity.

Theſe acts of faith, hope, and charity, which are the eſſential duties, and ſhould be the daily occupations, of a Chriſtian, are ſo many parts of prayer. Conſequently, unleſs we frequently exerciſe the powers of our ſouls in producing them, unleſs we be men of prayer, we cannot be diſciples of Jeſus otherwiſe than in name. Indeed, my beloved, the day will come, when the maſk will be taken off from thouſands who pretend to be his diſciples; and then they will be found to have aſſumed only the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, without any thing of its ſubſtance and reality. Were the impenetrable veil which conceals the diſpoſitions of men's hearts,

hearts, to be drawn aſide; could we read the ſecrets of the breaſts of all thoſe who compoſe this aſſembly; though by their very preſence in his temple, they declare themſelves followers of Jeſus, citizens of heaven, and ſtrangers upon earth, it is probable that many would be found to have no title to that honourable appellation. If the Miniſters of God, like the Cherubims ſtationed at the gates of the garden of Eden, were armed with a flaming ſword to exclude from the Sanctuary, thoſe who, like our firſt parents after their iniquity, inſtead of wiſhing to approach to the Lord in prayer and adoration, endeavour to hide themſelves from his preſence—oh! my God, how conſiderably would our numbers be diminiſhed!

There will be found men, whoſe thoughts are engaged from morning till night about the buſineſs and occupations of the world, who dwell on their worldly concerns with unwearied

perſeverance and inward delight; but are fatigued, quite oppreſſed, by a ſhort meditation on heavenly objects; relieve their uneaſineſs by a variety of diſtracting images which their fancy calls up before them, and ſeem to regret that God ſhould have the leaſt ſhare of their attention.—There will be found men who are all life and activity in purſuit of the emoluments of this world; but, when they have in view their celeſtial inheritance, are ever cold, languid, torpid, and indifferent; men, whoſe ſenſibility is readily enkindled at the ſight of a periſhable beauty; whoſe paſſions ruſh impetuouſly on to the enjoyment of ſenſual objects; but whoſe hearts are without any tender emotion, without any feeling of love, for that infinitely amiable Being who formed their hearts, who gave them the power to love, that they might adhere to him, the ſource of every excellence, with all the warmth of affection.—There will be found many, who, notwithſtanding

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the neceſſities of their condition, condemn them to toil and drudgery for ſix days of the week, and conſequently leave them but little leiſure to attend ſeriouſly to their eternal intereſts; yet, when that day arrives, which the Lord hath ſanctified for his ſervice, which he hath made a day of reſt from the ordinary buſineſs of life, that his creatures may apply without interruption to the work of prayer and praiſe; the day which his mercy hath ſet apart for them, that they may not be debarred from all communication with heaven; they employ it to conſume the little profits of their weekly labour in intemperance, drunkenneſs, and every ſpecies of abandoned profligacy; and thus make it a ſacrifice to the Prince of darkneſs.— There will be found perſons who are careful to be preſent every Sunday at the tremendous ſacrifice which is offered upon our altars; but make the whole of their piety conſiſt of that corporal preſence, and ſome trifling out-

ward obſervances, and think no more of God, either on that day, or on any of the ſucceeding days in the week. Vain and deluded religion? as if the Lord would look down with complacence on mere exterior ſhow, poſture, and grimace, the mockery of devotion; while we refuſe him the ſacrifice of a heart poured forth before him in all the tenderneſs of affection and gratitude, and regulated by the injunctions of his eternal wiſdom?—Such as anſwer theſe deſcriptions, every where abound. But theſe have no ſhare in the friendſhip, in the graces, and in the inheritance of Jeſus. And where are thoſe who are truly men of prayer? Oh! divine Saviour, increaſe their numbers: infuſe into our hearts the ſpirit of prayer, renew in us the ſpirit of true piety. Alas! it ſeems to have departed from amongſt thy people.

But, perhaps, my brethren, you will be more efficaciouſly excited to have continual recourſe to prayer by the

ſenſe of your preſent wants and miſeries, than by the conviction of what you owe to your Creator, and of what is neceſſarily implied in your vocation to the faith of Chriſt Jeſus. Having therefore conſidered prayer as the eſſential duty of men, and of Chriſtians, I come now to conſider its neceſſity and advantages as they flow from our innumerable weakneſſes and diſtreſſes.

II. When the Soul is touched with a lively ſenſe of her own misfortunes, it is her firſt relief to expreſs them. She deſcribes them in all the energy of language: her feelings give eloquence to her expreſſions. In the recital of her heart-felt griefs ſhe knows no languor, no wearineſs. She is comforted and delighted by depoſiting her ſorrows in the boſom of thoſe from whom ſhe can hope an alleviation.

That mankind is daily expoſed to a multitude and variety of evils and afflictions, is an obſervation ſo obvious, that to undertake to confirm it, would

be to employ your time to very little purpoſe. Every one has beheld the miſeries ariſing from various caſualties, from poverty, ſickneſs, ignominy, oppreſſion, injuſtice, and from other evils which infeſt human life. Perhaps there are few here preſent but have experienced in themſelves many of theſe evils. Some, it is probable, have been ready to ſink under the preſſure of calamity. Theſe temporal evils human attention and ſkill may ſometimes diminiſh, and ſometimes avert: but the moſt enlightened judgement cannot always guard againſt them. They depend upon a chain of natural events, which the great Author of nature holds in his hands; and without his pleaſure not one link ſhall be moved from its place.

Beſides temporal evils, there are other more fatal calamities over which faith and religion weeps; calamities which lead to ſin and eternal death. Of this kind are the ungovernable deſires within our own breaſts; the conflict of tumultuous paſſion warring againſt our reaſon; the

ſnares of temptation ſpread every where around us; the attractions of earthly vanity; the contagious example of the children of iniquity; the malice and violence of infernal ſpirits, who go about with the fury of roaring lions, ſeeking whom they may devour. In this warfare we are all engaged; with theſe enemies we muſt continually ſtruggle in our paſſage through time to eternity.

To imagine, that, left to ourſelves, we can walk ſecurely through ſo many ſurrounding perils, is to imagine, that imbecillity, without ſword or ſhield, can triumph over a hoſt of foes; that life can be ſupported without nouriſhment; that, without light and without a guide, we can diſtinguiſh the paths of truth and virtue, from the inſidious and alluring ways of error, guilt, and perdition. *Without me*, ſays our Redeemer, *you can do nothing*. (Jo. xv.)

How then are we to have recourſe to him? how to obtain the aid of his graces, unleſs by prayer, which he hath appoint-

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ed the mode of communication between himſelf and his creatures? *Aſk, and you ſhall receive. If you aſk the Father any thing in my name, he will give it you.* If, therefore, we neglect to aſk, on what can we ground our hopes of being relieved? To expect that the Lord will break through the eſtabliſhed laws of his providence, by which he hath decreed to beſtow upon us his bleſſings, in proportion to the fervour and perſeverance of our ſupplications; to flatter ourſelves that he will work a miracle in our favour, as the reward of our obſtinate reſiſtance to his loving invitations, as a recompence for our contempt of his commands; were ſurely the moſt inſolent preſumption.

Hence it is our duty and intereſt, not only to have recourſe to God at ſtated times and ſeaſons, or in the hour of great perils and temptations, but to ſhelter ourſelves continually and habitually under the ſhadow of his wings, and to be conſtantly looking up for pro-

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tection to the Holy Mountain where he dwells. If there be a day of your lives, my brethren, in which you may not be overcome in that conteſt, which, by its event, will determine your eternal lot; if there be a moment in which you are not tottering on the brink of a perilous precipice; if there be a moment in which you may not be puffed up by the pride of proſperity, broken by adverſity, ſeduced by criminal pleaſure, ſoured by diſappointments; if there be ſuch a moment, then, I grant it, you have no intereſt in running to the Lord with humble ſupplication: but, never can you be thus ſecure: no; not in any moment can you eſcape perdition, but by dwelling in the protection of the God of Heaven.

Permit me now to aſk you, my friends, in your troubles and afflictions, whether ſpiritual or temporal, has it ever been your firſt thought to lift up your eyes to the Father of Mercies, from whom your ſuccour muſt come? As to ſpiritual

tual diſtreſſes, perhaps they have given you little concern. Criminal habits have long tyrannized over your ſouls: year after year you have been deaf to the calls of the divine goodneſs;—But have you fervently begged of Jeſus to ſoften your hard and ſtony heart, to break the chains forged by your paſſions, to make that change of life which to corrupt nature appears ſo ſhocking and painful, become to you eaſy and comfortable? Ah! if you had aſked, the Lord would have granted your petition; long ere this your joy would have been full; you would have abounded with graces, conſolations and merits. But you, alas! even when you were uneaſy in your ſituation, when the ſorrows of iniquity weighed you down, when the ſtings of remorſe tortured your ſouls, you ſought to baniſh every painful idea, by having recourſe to meriment, jollity, intoxication, and riot; you endeavoured to drown your anxieties by extinguiſhing the light of reaſon,

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and deſcending to a level even with the beaſts of the field. Oh! deluded man! you ſought relief by plunging ſtill more deeply into miſery: you ſought for comfort, by removing ſtill farther from the God of all conſolation.

In temporal misfortunes, the firſt emotions of men's hearts are generally murmurings againſt Providence, as if partiality or injuſtice could have influenced its appointments. Then they ſeek aſſiſtance from relations, friends, and acquaintances: they apply to men, who, like themſelves, are but the creatures of God; who, if they do any kindneſs, are only inſtruments in the hands of the great Giver of all good gifts: they apply to men, whoſe powers of doing good, even when exerted to the utmoſt, are ſo ſmall and ineffectual; to men, whoſe conceptions are ſo limited, whoſe liberalities are ſo circumſcribed by their condition: they apply firſt to men, unmindful of the great and inexhauſtible fountain whence every bleſſing and comfort muſt be ultimately

mately derived. Oh! my beloved, if you have acted thus, no wonder your ſorrows were not aſſuaged; no wonder your tribulations multiplied around you.—Even if you received from men the aſſiſtance which you craved, you may tremble, leſt bleſſings, which you ſought to obtain independently of your Creator, ſhould, in your hands, be converted into curſes, and become the occaſions of your everlaſting ruin.

Oh! my Friends, is Fortune a deity that can ſupply your wants? Did not the Lord create you and all things? Doth he not this moment preſerve you? Doth he not hold the ball of the earth, and all the works of nature, in his hands? Dare you then to make a ſacrifice, and offer up the incenſe of your prayers on an altar which is not erected to him? *Thus ſaith the Lord*, by the prophet Iſaias: *you... that have forgotten my holy mount, that ſet a table for fortune, and offer libations upon it, I will number you in the ſword, and you ſhall all fall by ſlaughter.....Therefore.....*

behold,

behold, my ſervants ſhall eat, and you ſhall be hungry....behold, my ſervants ſhall rejoice, and you ſhall be confounded: behold, my ſervants ſhall praiſe for joyfulneſs of heart; and you ſhall cry for ſorrow of heart, and ſhall howl for grief of ſpirit. (Iſ. lxv.) It is painful, my beloved, to be forced to make theſe reflexions. Nothing ſets the depravity of human nature in ſo ſtriking a light, as the conſideration that the promiſes, invitations, and even entreaties, of the Lord, who has every bleſſing in his hands, cannot prevail on his diſtreſſed creatures to have recourſe to him for aſſiſtance.

III. But you will perhaps tell me, that conſtant application to prayer is incompatible with the diſtracting occupations of life; that the weight of concupiſcence continually forces your attention to the ſenſible objects with which you are ſurrounded; that even the various duties of your ſtation will not allow you to give to this holy exerciſe any more than a few rapid moments. Ah! theſe are indeed

deed pitiful excuſes. Why, theſe are the very motives which ſhould induce you to pray. The diſtractions of your ſituation, the tumults of the world, the weight of concupiſcence, the dangers which ſurround you, theſe are the objects which demand your tears and ſighs, which ſhould awaken your hopes and fears: theſe are the very materials, the very nouriſhment of prayer. It is becauſe you are thus ſituated, that you are bound to pray, and to pray without intermiſſion.

The occupations of the moſt buſy life are no obſtacle to continual prayer. How ſhould they? Your miſtake lies in ſuppoſing prayer to be an arrangement of choice ideas and profound ſpeculations. You think that prayer is a ſcience; whereas, it is no more than the ſimple effuſions of the heart, the unadorned and artleſs language of the affections. You imagine, that to pray, is to recite a ſet form of ſentences; to add one word to another till their multitude

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fills up whole hours with very little ſentiment, and a ſucceſſion of wearineſs, diſtractions, and diſguſts: and you thence conclude, that domeſtic concerns, the toils of buſineſs, parental cares, the functions of civil life, the attentions of politeneſs, and the duties of various ſtates, are an interruption to it. 'Tis no ſuch thing. The continual prayer which Jeſus commands, is not a recital of words, but the cries of a heart weeping over its own diſtreſſes, and animated with glowing deſires of the good things of eternity. Theſe ſentiments are properly prayer; and theſe cannot be interrupted by the duties of our ſtation, the fatigues of drudgery, or the hurry and buſtle of life. Theſe ſentiments, inſtead of being any obſtacle to our various employments, facilitate all our obligations, and ſanctify every action which we perform.

Come then, my beloved, *let us* all *go with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in ſeaſonable*

ſonable aid; (Heb. iv.) and let each one's prayer be dictated by his own particular exigencies. Let the rich man pray, that his affluence may not involve him in guilt; that he may uſe this world as if he uſed it not; that he may conſider wealth, then only as a bleſſing, when it is employed to purchaſe a permanent treaſure in heaven, by works of benevolence to the afflicted and unfortunate. You, my friends, whoſe rank is exalted above that of the greater part of mankind, and whoſe revenue is adequate to all the conveniencies, comforts, and luxuries of life; indeed I cannot but fear for you, leſt, while you are ſurrounded by ſo many ſmiling pleaſures, and enjoy ſo many paſſing delights, you ſhould reſt in preſent ſatisfactions, unmindful of the good things of eternity. Oh! be your ſituation on earth ever ſo fortunate, you will not ſurely forget the bleſſed Jeruſalem! The ſentiments of a true Chriſtian, in an elevated ſtation in life, are beautifully expreſſed by holy David in various parts of

of his inſpired Canticles. "Wo is me!" ſaid he: and he, you will remember, was ſurrounded by all the ſplendours of royalty—"wo is me, that my ſojourning is prolonged far from the holy city where God dwells! My ſoul hath been long a ſojourner. Sitting at Babylon, on the banks of a river, which, by the turbulence and rapid courſe of its waters, is an image of the inconſtancy and vanity of human enjoyments, my ſoul melted with ſorrow when I remembered Sion. My ſoul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord." Theſe are the feelings of a faithful diſciple of Jeſus. His cares, his diſquietudes, his hopes, and fears, have all a tendency to his heavenly inheritance. St. Paul has given us, with one ſtroke of his pencil, the complete portrait of a Chriſtian, when he deſcribes him to be one, who is *looking for the bleſſed hope, and coming of the glory of the great God, and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt.* (Tit. ii.)

You,

You, likewiſe, my poor brethren, on whom the world frowns, you muſt continually run to God by humble prayer, in theſe your days of tribulation. There is no character which he more frequently aſſumes to himſelf in the ſacred oracles, than that of the patron of the diſtreſſed. He hears all prayers; but he liſtens with particular attention to the cries of the poor, and the prayers of the deſtitute. If his wiſdom ſaw it expedient to place you in an afflicted ſtate, that ſtate, however, he regards with commiſeration. Make him then your friend. He invites you to pour out your hearts before him. That poverty which the world deſpiſes, only intereſts him the more in your favour. Obſcurity cannot conceal you from his notice. Though forgotten by every friend on earth, you are remembered by the God of heaven. The ſigh heaved from the afflicted breaſt, which is heard by no human ear, is liſtened to by him.

Let the wiſe and enlightened pray that their reaſon be not obſcured by the exhalations which ariſe from their paſſions, and the fumes of ſelf-love. Let the illiterate and the ignorant pray that the light of heavenly wiſdom may ſhine on their minds, and guide them into the ways of truth and goodneſs. Let the ſinner inceſſantly pray till he be converted to his God; and let the juſt man daily pray, that perſeverance may crown all his virtuous endeavours, and introduce him to the kingdom of God.

SERMON XXX.

SUNDAY AFTER THE ASCENSION.

On the Aſcenſion of Jeſus.

The Lord Jeſus....was taken up into heaven, and ſitteth on the right hand of God.
Mark xvi. 19.

AT length, after a life of labours and pains, a life begun in tears, continued in perſecution, and ended in torments, the Son of God retires from this earthly dwelling, in which his ſenſible preſence was no longer neceſſary, and returns into the glory of his Father. How wonderfully is he now changed! How bliſsful is the ſtate in which we now behold him! Daughters of Sion, go forth and ſee your King in the diadem wherewith he is crowned,

crowned, and in the day of the joy of his heart: ſee him bearing the ſceptre which his victories over death and hell have put into his hands; an immortal ſceptre, by which men and angels ſhall be eternally ſwayed.

Who is there amongſt us, but muſt feel his heart beat with joy on this occaſion! who, but muſt participate the happineſs which Jeſus in his humanity hath ſo deſervedly acquired! Oh! it is ſweet to us to join our voices to the melody of the celeſtial ſpirits, and celebrate, in concert with them, this glorious feſtivity. The Church feels a tender intereſt in the pomp of this noble triumph. To her it is indeed delightful, to behold her loving ſpouſe, the dear object of her affections, taking poſſeſſion of his kingdom, amidſt the loud acclamations of all the bright inhabitants of the heavenly Jeruſalem. Sweet too is the reflexion, that ſhe has in heaven an advocate and protector, who will call for and obtain the exertions of omnipotence in her favour, who now

triumphs and receives dominion, that her children may one day reign with him, and triumph in his train. He withdraws his ſenſible preſence from among the inhabitants of the earth; but he does not leave us: no, though we are ſo often ungratefully forgetful of him, we are ſtill the objects of his tenderneſs, ſtill we are dear to him. He will have our intereſts blended with his. Generous beyond example or conception, he ſhares with us the ſpoils which he has ſeized, the kingdom which he has won; and if he deprive us of the comfort of beholding him on earth, he does it with a view to beſtow upon us more ſubſtantial and valuable bleſſings.

The myſtery which has now aſſembled us together, preſents before us a double proſpect; a proſpect into the happineſs of Jeſus, and into the happineſs which is reſerved for ourſelves. Conſidered, therefore, in theſe points of view, the day which we now celebrate is indeed a day of jubilation: it is the day on which

Jeſus,

Jeſus, our leader and our head, was crowned with a diadem of glory; and it is the day on which we were emboldened to aſpire to a participation of the ſame glory. Theſe are the comfortable ideas which I mean to offer to your attention.

I. Yes, my brethren, the period is arrived, in which the earth is doomed to loſe a treaſure, of which, when poſſeſſed, it knew not the value. Jeſus quits the ſociety of ſinful men, is elevated to the celeſtial regions, and takes his ſeat on the right hand of his eternal Father. We will follow this illuſtrious Conqueror, at leaſt in thought; we will accompany him to the higheſt heavens, and notice each circumſtance of his triumph.

Firſt, therefore, on what title does he demand his kingdom, and claim the crown of glory? Is it, becauſe his omnipotent voice has called the dead from their cold and ſilent monuments, to life and vigour? Is it, becauſe his commands have huſhed the boiſterous waves, and

calmed the fury of the tempeſtuous Ocean, and performed thoſe other ſtupendous works which Nature beheld with inexpreſſible aſtoniſhment?—No: it is becauſe he hath ſuffered; becauſe he hath humbled himſelf; becauſe he hath been obedient, where obedience was moſt bitter, and even unto death. *Having joy ſet before him,* he *endured the croſs, deſpiſing the ſhame.* (Heb. xii.) *He humbled himſelf....wherefore God alſo hath exalted him, and hath given him a name which is above every name.* (Phil. ii.)

He was, indeed, a man of ſorrows, and well acquainted with diſtreſs. Innocence itſelf, he merited to enjoy every pleaſure; and was ſatiated with bitterneſs. His was the earth, and the fullneſs thereof; and he had not where to recline his head. Every expreſſion of reſpect, veneration, and homage, which men or Angels were capable of deviſing, could bear no proportion to his greatneſs and excellence; and he was inſulted, ridiculed, deſpiſed. The tears which, in the manger

of

of Bethlehem, began to ſtream down his infant cheeks, continued to flow till the laſt hour of his mortal life. A chalice of afflictions was ſet before him, and he drank it cheerfully to the very dregs. Behold, then, in this heroic patience, in this ſubmiſſion to the will of his Father, the ſource of his future greatneſs. It is to celebrate theſe virtues, that the Angels are bringing the palms of victory: the brilliant diadem which ſhall encircle his brows, is to honour this humility and ſelf-abaſement.

Accompanied by his Diſciples he goes to mount Olivet; and this mountain, which was witneſs to the firſt agonies of his paſſion, becomes the theatre on which he diſplays his glory. There he gives to his Diſciples his laſt inſtructions, and bids them a tender farewell; and behold, while he is yet ſpeaking, he is elevated into the air. His Diſciples, in aſtoniſhment and grief, follow him with eager looks, which is all they can do, till a bright cloud receives him, and intercepts

their view, while they ſtill remain gazing on the dear ſpot where they laſt beheld him. He aſcends, not as Elias did, who was taken up in a chariot of fire; not as the ſouls of juſt men, who are carried by the bleſſed Angels into the boſom of Abraham; but he aſcends, ſupported by his own omnipotence, and continues his triumphant courſe to the gates of the celeſtial paradiſe.

The immortal ſpirits who ſurround the throne of God, the Princes of the heavenly hoſts, and all the bright train of the bleſſed, come forth to meet him and to receive him. *Who is this*, they ſay, *that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Boſra; this beautiful one in his robe, walking in the greatneſs of his ſtrength? I that ſpeak juſtice, and am a defender to ſave.* (Iſ. vi.) *Lift up your gates, ye Princes, and ye eternal gates, be ye lifted up, and the King of Glory ſhall enter in: the Lord ſtrong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.* (Pſ. xxiii.) Then the illuſtrious inhabitants of the bleſſed Jeruſalem fall down

down proſtrate before him in profound adoration; the Princes of the heavenly court caſt their crowns at his feet, and conduct him to the throne of the living God, ſinging, as they proceed, "Worthy is the Lamb who was ſlain, to receive honour, glory, benediction, and praiſe, for ever and ever."

Compared with this ſpectacle, how pitiful is all the pomp of human greatneſs! how eclipſed the ſplendours of the Roman Conqueror, who, in his triumphal car, ſurrounded by all the pageantry of earthly grandeur and magnificence, proceeded to the Capitol, and depoſited his frivolous laurels at the ſhrine of a chimerical divinity!

Jeſus preſents to his eternal Father the ſpoils which he has acquired, and the trophies of his victories over the world, over ſin, death, and hell. *Father*, ſaith he—and the court of Heaven liſtens with delight to the recital of his noble achievements—*Father, I have glorified thee on the earth*: (Jo. xvii.) every idol of the Gen-

tiles is fallen from its baſe; their oracles are ſtruck dumb for ever: I have erected altars to thy name; infamous mortals and ſenſeleſs deities, the work of men's hands, no more ſhall ſhare that incenſe which ſhould burn on thy altars only. *I have finiſhed the work which thou gaveſt me to do:* I have redeemed thy people, expiated their crimes, ſubdued their enemies. *I have manifeſted thy name to the men whom thou haſt given me out of the world:* now thou wilt have adorers in ſpirit and in truth. *The words which thou gaveſt me I have given to them, and they have received them. Holy Father, keep them in thy name whom thou haſt given me, that they may be one as we alſo are. And now, gloriſy thou me, O Father, with thyſelf, with the glory which I had before the world was with thee.* 'Tis done: he is exalted to the right hand of the Moſt High; he receives the nations for his inheritance, and for his poſſeſſion the ends of the earth; peace, joy, and ſplendour, ſur-

round

round his throne; and of his kingdom there ſhall be no end.

Having thus contemplated, with the eye of faith, the glory of Jeſus in his aſcenſion, let us reflect our thoughts inwardly upon ourſelves, and endeavour to improve our hearts, and reform our conduct, from the view of this illuſtrious triumph. You have ſeen the virtues which merited, for the humanity of Jeſus, this diſtinguiſhed pre-eminence; you know the titles which ſecured to him this bleſſed inheritance: remember, therefore, that the ſame virtues, the ſame titles, and no other, will open the gates of heaven for you. He hath marked out before you the track which leads to glory; and in his footſteps you muſt purſue your way through life, if you mean to arrive at the ſame bliſsful term. When your Soul, at the moment of diſſolution, ſhall preſent herſelf for admiſſion into the kingdom of Chriſt, you will not be interrogated as to your riches, your authority, your rank and condition in life, whe-

ther abject or exalted: but inquiry will be made into your virtues, into your obedience to the will of Heaven, and your fidelity to God in your reſpective ſituations. If you poſſeſs authority and power, you will be aſked, Whether you have imitated Jeſus, in exerting thoſe advantages for the good of mankind, for the protection of the oppreſſed, for the intereſts of virtue? If of poor and mean condition, Whether, like Jeſus, you have calmly acquieſced in the divine will, and ſubmitted, contentedly and cheerfully, to all the appointments of Providence? Theſe are your titles to glory—the peculiar virtues of your ſtation, of your age, and of your ſex, the fruits of your faith and religion. Above all, loſe not ſight of this truth, bear conſtantly in mind, That the exaltation of Jeſus is proportionate to his humility. *He humbled himſelf, wherefore God hath exalted him.* The Lord, who reſiſts the proud, looks down with pleaſure on poverty of ſpirit and humility of heart. Whether

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these virtues be maintained amidst the splendours of high birth and boundless affluence, or in the rags of beggary, the Lord delights to honour them, and will crown them with a diadem of glory before the assembly of men and Angels. It is humility that exalts men to dignity in the court of Heaven. Just, O Lord, and equitable, is thy decree. Thou for us wast humbled and despised; and shall not we, worms of the earth, be content to share thy lot amongst men, while we aspire to the glory of thy ascension?

II. Yes, my beloved: for I said, in the second place, that the mystery which we this day celebrate, emboldens us to expect a participation of that glory which we now honour in Christ Jesus. He is the vine, we the branches: he is our head, we are the members of his mystical body. Were we to be separated from him, a destruction of order and propriety would take place: and that he never could design. Nay, he has clearly explained to us his intentions. *I shall go,*

said

ſaid he, *and prepare a place for you:* and *I will come again, and will take you to myſelf; that where I am, you alſo may be.* (Jo. xiv.) What more explicit aſſurances can we look for to animate our confidence? On what pillar more firm can our hopes be reſted? Our expectations of eternal bliſs reſemble not thoſe chimerical hopes which are but the offspring of vanity, which are realized only in imagination, and prove as fallacious in the iſſue, as their principle was empty and unſubſtantial. Our hope of heaven is not to be compared with thoſe projects and ſchemes, which are deviſed by human prudence and foreſight; which we oftentimes imagine to be ſecure, becauſe we are weak enough to ſuppoſe, that we have employed every mean neceſſary to forward them, and removed every obſtacle which might impede or retard their accompliſhment. Alas! my friends, nothing human can be permanent, nothing ſolid or ſecure: for the world is a figure that paſſes away; and it frequent-

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ly happens, after all our labours, that when we ſtretch out our eager hands to ſeize the object of our wiſhes, what we think to be the moment of poſſeſſion, is the moment when it eludes our endeavours, baffles all our attempts, and eſcapes us for ever. But our hopes of a heavenly kingdom are built on the promiſes of eternal truth; and the completion of them is manifeſted in the perſon of Jeſus. *While* the Apoſtles looked on, *he was raiſed up.* He ſhows them the career which he hath opened before them, and the term to which it leads. *I aſcend,* ſaith he, *to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God.* (Jo. xx.) See, the heavens bend down, and are opened to receive me. Follow me, therefore, you that are my diſciples. Henceforth, until the moment come when you ſhall be united to me in glory, let Heaven be the entertainment of your thoughts, the center of your deſires, the dear object of all your affections. *I go to prepare a place for you.* (Jo. xiv.)

But,

But, with all theſe encouragements, do we confidently aſpire to immortal bliſs? It is the property of hope, when it is lively and active, to inſpire man with courage, to make him brave dangers, to give a vigour to all his faculties, which breaks out in the moſt heroic exertions. Feeble man, from the hope of acquiring a fortune, truſts himſelf to the mercy of tempeſtuous winds, and a boiſterous ocean: he ſails to the Indies, and to the Pole. Neither the dangerous variety of climates through which he muſt paſs, nor the rocks againſt which his veſſel may be daſhed to pieces, can ſhake his intrepid mind: he beholds multitudes periſh around him, and the ſame ruin menaces him from every ſide: ſtill he proceeds; he hopes he ſhall ſucceed; he looks forward to the gains which he may acquire, and the expectation ſmooths his way before him.

Oh! Chriſtian, compare the droniſh indolence of your hope for heavenly bleſſings, with the fervid activity of the children

children of this world in purſuit of their inferior, and often only fancied advantages. How humiliating the contraſt! The ſlighteſt oppoſition deters, and drives us back: the ſmalleſt violence which we offer to inordinate ſelf-love, caſts a damp upon our ſpirits. A ſneer unmans, an empty raillery diſconcerts us. Such, alas! are too frequently in Chriſtians the only fruits of hope, and of a hope which, if they will but continue on their courſe, they know nothing can fruſtrate.

Oh! my friends, let a holy confuſion now operate in our hearts, and rouze all our zeal and fervour. While we ſail through the perilous ocean of this mortal life, if the winds of temptation ſhall ariſe, if the torrent of bad example ſhall violently oppoſe our progreſs towards the wiſhed for haven, we will look up to Jeſus ſitting at the right hand of God: he, like an auſpicious, friendly ſtar, will mark the courſe we are to follow, and ſhed his benign influence upon us. We will conſtantly look forward to the bleſ-

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ſings which await the completion of our labours; and by this view we ſhall be ſtrengthened, cheered, and comforted.

The difficulties which you will have to encounter in ſecuring to yourſelves the inheritance which Jeſus offers, are incomparably fewer than thoſe with which the ambitious muſt contend in their way to any earthly pre-eminence. They, to gain favour and obtain ſupport, muſt watch each favourable moment; muſt bend to the caprices of other men, ſtudy their humours and whims, however irrational and ridiculous; and, when they have ſubmitted to theſe mean ſervilities, nothing is more common with them than to meet with ſupercilious contempt, or, at leaſt, cool indifference, in return for the moſt important ſervices. But, the Being whoſe favour and friendſhip you court, beholds the ſecrets of your hearts: a good-will alone will ſatisfy him: if you do what is in your power, he is well content. He judges not from the event, nor from the exterior ſplendour of your actions,

tions, but from the principle whence they proceed. The meaneſt action is great in his eſtimation, provided it be derived from a principle of divine love. Patience in adverſity, meekneſs in receiving injuries, compaſſion for the unfortunate, ſweetneſs and affability to your fellow-creatures, an attention to the employments of your ſtation, however in themſelves low and inſignificant, theſe private virtues, of which the world makes little account, will accumulate for you treaſures inexhauſtible. Even a cup of cold water, offered by the hand of charity, becomes a ſource ſpringing up to life eternal.

With theſe brilliant proſpects before us, can we ſtill lie grovelling on the earth, amidſt ſenſual, vile, and fleeting ſatisfactions? When Jeſus invites us to come and be made Princes in the bleſſed Jeruſalem, are we yet obſtinately bent on remaining in ſervitude? Do we yet embrace the chains which enſlave us? Deluded man! what are you doing, while

you

you doat on a world, which, vaſt as it is, is not ſo great as your own heart? *Son*, ſaid the pious Mother of the Maccha-bees, when ſhe exhorted her youngeſt child to brave the fury of the tyrant, *Son, look up to the Heavens.* And this is what I this day recommend to you: Look up to the Heavens. The earth is not worthy of you: you are born to a higher, a nobler deſtiny. Heaven is the ſeat of your felicity: Heaven is promiſed you; it is purchaſed for you; its eternal gates are opened to receive you. Jeſus calls you to himſelf, and extends his hand to introduce you into the abodes of endleſs peace, in the ſociety of his elect.

SERMON

SERMON XXXI.

WHITSUNDAY.

On the Deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt.

They were all filled with the Holy Ghoſt.
Acts ii. 4.

WHEN the hour drew near, in which Jeſus was to aſcend to his eternal Father, his Diſciples were depreſſed with melancholy and grief. The idea of being ſeparated from him whom their hearts ſo tenderly loved, of loſing him who was the ſupport of their weakneſs, the center of all their hopes and comforts, was to them moſt bitter, painful, and diſtreſſing. But he graciouſly aſſuaged their ſorrows, by aſſuring them, that, when he ſhould retire from the earth, he would ſend them a comforter from on high,

the Spirit of truth, who ſhould teach them all truth ; the Paraclete, who ſhould animate their drooping courage, conſole them in their griefs, and abide with them to the end of the world. The promiſe is fulfilled in the myſtery which we now celebrate. On this ever-memorable day, the Spirit of God, the third perſon of the adorable Trinity, equal to the Father and the Son, the Comforter, the ſource of ſanctification, deſcends upon the Diſciples, enriches them with his gifts, and, by the influence of his graces, forms them to all the heroiſm of the moſt perfect virtue.

Nor were the bleſſings of this day confined to the Apoſtles only : they are perpetuated even to the end of ages. The Divine Spirit abides with the Diſciples of Jeſus to the conſummation of the world, repleniſhing their hearts with his gifts, adorning them with his lovely ornaments, invigorating them by his power, and uniting them to himſelf by an ineffable union of love. You and I,

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my friends, if we be faithful followers of Jeſus, have received this ſpirit: by it, as Chriſtians, we live, move, and have our exiſtence. The deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt upon our ſouls is not, indeed, accompanied by thoſe exterior and ſenſible ſigns by which he declared his preſence in the firſt ages of Chriſtianity: he ſtrikes not our ſenſes by the prodigies of a vehement wind ruſhing in upon us, and tongues of fire blazing over our heads. Faith being now eſtabliſhed, and Religion triumphant, ſuch extraordinary manifeſtations of Divine Power are no longer neceſſary: but, if we have received the Holy Ghoſt, though the circumſtances of his deſcent upon us be widely different, yet the effects which he produces in us muſt be proportionably the ſame as thoſe which were obſervable in the Apoſtles. Nor can we proceed with certainty in forming a judgement, whether we are really filled with this Divine Spirit, otherwiſe than by viewing the manner in which he operated in the

conduct

conduct of the Apoſtles, and comparing our conduct with theirs.

That we be enabled to form ſuch a judgement with all poſſible certainty, is doubtleſs of the higheſt importance to our intereſts. It is therefore my preſent intention, to aſſiſt you to draw the compariſon, by pointing out ſome of the effects produced by the ſpirit of God in the lives of the firſt Diſciples; as I know not how I can treat of this myſtery in a manner more inſtructive to your minds, or improving to your hearts.

1. After the aſcenſion of Jeſus, the Diſciples went back penſive to Jeruſalem, and remained in pious ſolitude, expecting the promiſed gift from Heaven. Ten days had been now ſpent in this ſacred retirement: *and when the days of the Pentecoſt were accompliſhed...ſuddenly there came a ſound from Heaven, as of a mighty wind coming; and it filled the whole houſe where they were ſitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues, as it were,*

of

of fire; and it ſat upon every one of them: and they were all filled with the Holy Ghoſt; and they began to ſpeak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghoſt gave them to ſpeak. Now a great number of Jews, *devout men, out of every nation under Heaven,* were aſſembled together at Jeruſalem, to celebrate the feſtival of Pentecoſt: and, when this extraordinary event became public, they ran in crowds to the houſe in which the Diſciples were retired. The Apoſtles then came out, and addreſſed themſelves, not only to the natives of Paleſtine, but to the Romans, Greeks, Aſſyrians, Egyptians, Perſians, Medes, Arabians, and to men of every country and dialect. Judge how great muſt have been the aſtoniſhment of this multitude of people from various nations, when they heard the illiterate fiſhermen deliver their ſentiments in the reſpective language of each country, with as much propriety, energy, and facility, as if from their infancy they had ſpoken no other.

While they remained in a ſtate of aſtoniſhment mingled with terror, from being witneſſes to ſo ſtupendous a prodigy, Peter ſeized the moment, and, raiſing his voice, unfolded to them the myſtery which was juſt accompliſhed. The diſcourſe which he made on the occaſion, is recorded in the Acts of the Apoſtles: in it, with clear and cogent arguments, he demonſtrates the divinity of Jeſus. Tracing the myſterious ways of Heaven from the oracles of the Prophets down to the deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt, he explains the wonderful diſpenſations of God's providence in the redemption of man; and ſupports his explanation by reaſonings ſo juſt and ſolid, that it might have been imagined, the ſtudy of the ſacred Writings had been the employment of his life, and that long application and practice had formed him to eloquence.

Behold, my friends, the firſt happy effect which flows from the preſence of the Divine Spirit. He imparts underſtanding

ing to penetrate heavenly truths: he enlightens the mind: he gives an intimate perſuaſion and conviction of truth, and a power of perſuading and convincing others. The myſteries of the kingdom of God had long before been made known to the Apoſtles. *All things*, ſaid their Divine Lord, *whatſoever I have heard of my father, I have made known to you.* (Jo. xv.) And yet, how uninformed, how ignorant they were! how groſs were their conceptions when he departed from them! After three years of almoſt continual inſtruction, they hardly yet knew for what end he had appeared on the earth; they did not yet underſtand, that the world was redeemed by the effuſion of his blood. Even on the day of his aſcenſion, ſo little were they acquainted with his ways, that they were figuring to themſelves the deliverance of Judea from the Roman yoke, and expecting to behold him ſitting on the temporal throne of David. It was neceſſary, therefore, that the Holy Ghoſt ſhould

come, and make the truths, which they had been taught by Jeſus, clear and penetrable to their minds. *Theſe things*, ſaid he, *have I ſpoken to you, abiding with you: but the Paraclete, the Holy Ghoſt, whom the Father will ſend in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, whatſoever I ſhall have ſaid to you.* (Jo. xiv.)

We may obſerve that the Holy Ghoſt, taking poſſeſſion of the ſoul, gives to the knowledge which we have acquired by our faith, the ſame advantages that are derived to figures and colours from the rays of the ſun. If we enter, in the darkneſs of night, into a magnificent palace, though the ceilings be beautifully ornamented, the furniture elegant and ſuperb, the hangings richly embroidered, the paintings of the moſt brilliant tints and animated colouring, ſtill we perceive nothing; theſe beauties and this magnificence are, in our regard, as if they did not exiſt. But, when the ſun riſes above the horizon, though it is not the ſun that

decorates

decorates the apartments, that gives colouring to the paintings or beauty to the furniture, the rays of that beneficent luminary call theſe pleaſing objects into reality, with reſpect to us, and enable them to charm our eyes, and excite our admiration. Thus it is, my brethren, with the truths of Religion, and the precepts of Chriſtian morality. We have a ſufficient knowledge of them: they have been inculcated to us from our tendereſt infancy; and continual inſtructions, derived from books or other ſources, have contributed to ſtrengthen our firſt impreſſions. Yet, how often does it happen, that all our knowledge lies, in a manner, dormant and unnoticed in our minds; that, out of ſo many truths which adorn our underſtanding, hardly one has any influence on the will, or works any change in our conduct! Though painted on the memory, they attract not any attention. But, when the Holy Ghoſt darts on the ſoul a ray of celeſtial light, oh! then theſe truths

come forward in the mind, preſent themſelves in full force, and diſplay before us all their charms: then we awake, as it were, out of a profound lethargy. It ſeems to us, that the impreſſions formerly made upon our minds by the doctrines of Religion, were like the faint traces of a dream: we feel as if we had emerged from the thickeſt gloom of night to the effulgence of meridian day. We are aſtoniſhed and aſhamed, when we look back on our lives, and reflect, that, though we were ſo well acquainted with truth, it ſhould have excited no efficacious affections in our hearts.

Examine, therefore, how far your actions are influenced by the principles of your faith; and you may then judge, whether you have received the Holy Ghoſt. All Chriſtians are perſuaded, for example, that the accompliſhment of the divine will, and the friendſhip of that eternal Being, who is wiſdom, beauty, and perfection, in its very ſource, are the only objects worthy of their eſteem and

love,

love, and ſhould be the primary end of all their endeavours. They believe, likewiſe, that inexpreſſible and never-ending woes are the portion of the impenitent ſinner. Yet many, and, alas! the far greater part, with theſe convictions on their minds, withdraw themſelves from their allegiance to their Creator, at the inſtigation of the ſlighteſt temptations; are more captivated by a fleeting pleaſure, than by the charms of infinite excellence; more affected by the dread of loſing a paltry intereſt, than by the tremendous proſpect into an eternity of miſeries.—Oh! my friends, if you have received the Holy Ghoſt, if now you be enlightened by the Spirit of God, you muſt conceive a greater horror of the laſt ſin than of any temporal calamity, or even of the whole collection of human evils, could they be accumulated on your ſingle head: you muſt be aſtoniſhed to think, that men are capable of ſinning; amazed, when you reflect that you could

once ſin, and find any eaſe, or taſte any comfort, till you had expiated your crime.

Theſe are the ideas, theſe the feelings of a ſoul which views the truths of the Goſpel in the light which is diffuſed by the preſence of the Holy Ghoſt. But, that I may make you ſtill more ſenſible of the change worked in the human heart by this Divine Spirit, I will ſuppoſe, Chriſtian brother, that you, who are now perhaps fluctuating between Heaven and earth, attracted on the one hand by Divine Grace, on the other held back by the tyranny of the world, and of your own paſſions; you, who ſee the lovelineſs of virtue, but want fortitude ſufficient to ſurmount the obſtacles which retard you from its embraces; I will ſuppoſe, that this evening, when you are alone in your chamber, you ſhould ſuddenly ſee a light from Heaven ſhining round about you, and hear the voice of Jeſus conjuring you, as he did St. Paul, to perſecute him no longer, but to give him

him full poſſeſſion of that heart in which he wiſhes to reign, and which he deſires to repleniſh with his choiſeſt bleſſings. Think how you would then be affected. Would you refuſe? Would you heſitate? Oh! no: you would inſtantly caſt yourſelf at his feet, and vow to him eternal fidelity: you know, you feel that you would. Why then, my friends, why do you not perform the will of God without the aid of this miraculous interpoſition of his providence, with the ſame fervour as if you were thus eſpecially favoured? Could ſuch a viſion teach you any thing which you do not already know? Is not your faith firmly ſupported without this particular miracle? If not, you are not yet Chriſtians. Are you not as certain, that there is an eternal recompence prepared for God's ſervants, as if you had, with St. Paul, been carried up to Paradiſe? Are you not convinced, that God hath a juſt, an indefeaſible right to all your homage; that he hath beſtowed upon you infinite favours; that he hath done every

thing for you? Hath he not ſhown you his will; pointed out to you the way in which you muſt walk? Doth he not, at this moment, make you an offer of his love, and demand only your heart in return? He does, my beloved; and if you have received the Holy Ghoſt, theſe truths muſt be as evident to your minds, and operate as forcibly on your lives, as if you had been eye-witneſſes to all his miracles, or heard the words of eternal life from his own mouth.

II. The light which was communicated by the Holy Ghoſt, not only threw the fulleſt evidence on the truths of Religion, but enkindled in the hearts of the Diſciples an ardent love for Jeſus, and inſpired them with the moſt active zeal in propagating his dominion over all the inhabitants of the earth. No ſooner have they received the Divine Spirit, but, actuated by a generous ardour, and ſtimulated by a celeſtial impulſe, they make the city of Jeruſalem reſound with the name, with the virtues, and with the doctrines

doctrines of their crucified Saviour: they dwell on that theme with ſuch extraordinary emotions of zeal, that ſome of the Jews attributed their behaviour to intoxication, aſſerting, that the fumes of wine had excited that kind of fury with which they ſeemed to be poſſeſſed: but the impreſſion their words made on the liſtening multitude, and the whole ſubſequent tenor of their conduct, were a quick refutation of the calumny. I need not here relate the wonders which their zeal wrought in after-times: ſuffice it to ſay, that it knew no other limits than the boundaries of the habitable world. Every where they ſpread abroad that fire which the Son of God came to caſt upon the earth. No obſtacle, no power, no force, could ſtop their progreſs. To their laſt breath they preached the kingdom of God. They ſpilt their blood in this cauſe, and then their blood continued to preach the faith of Jeſus. From their aſhes there aroſe new Chriſtians, new martyrs. Theſe rude and illiterate fiſh-

ermen conceived a project, vaſt, and filled with perils; the project of ſubjecting the whole earth to the crucified Jeſus; and that project they executed. At length every nation, the moſt remote, uncultivated, and barbarous, received the light of the Goſpel. The irreſiſtible power of the doctrines which they delivered, triumphed over every other eſtabliſhed mode of worſhip, however cloſely interwoven with the civil government of the ſtate; ſubdued the greateſt empire on the earth; ſaw the ſymbol of the croſs, of an inſtrument of torture, with which every idea of guilt, pain, and ignominy, had been hitherto connected, glitter on the helmets of the Roman legions; beheld the orators, philoſophers, and emperors, meekly bend their necks to the yoke of Jeſus.

A zeal ſimilar to that of the Apoſtles is another mark by which you may judge whether the Spirit of God operates in your ſouls. I do not aſk you, whether your activity and labours in promoting the

the glory of Jeſus, are equal to thoſe of St. Paul. Your ſituation will not allow of ſuch unremitting efforts. But do you contribute your endeavours according to your reſpective abilities? In your own families, at leaſt, where you have authority; in the circle of friends and acquaintances in which you move; do you earneſtly labour to conciliate/ reſpect, eſteem, and love, for virtue and piety? Do you diffuſe around you the ſweet odour of goodneſs?—Do not pretend to excuſe yourſelves from this duty, by alledging the lowlineſs of your ſtation. You may find, in every ſituation, a thouſand means of communicating truth, and promoting the intereſts of virtue. Actuated by the Spirit of God, every one, even the meaneſt of the faithful, becomes an Apoſtle. *I will pour out my Spirit,* ſaith the Lord, *upon all fleſh, and your ſons and your daughters ſhall propheſy.* (Joel ii.) Every Chriſtian may be that leaven mentioned in the Goſpel, which ſpreads itſelf with heats, and gives a new form

form to the whole maſs with which it is blended. In a faithful Diſciple of Jeſus, each word, each action is edifying: his air, dreſs, and manner, his very ſilence is inſtructive. He preaches by his modeſty, his meekneſs, his charity; by his recollection and fervour in prayer, by the continual exerciſe of ſelf-government: and thus he does frequently more eſſential ſervice to virtue, than could be done by the moſt eloquent perſuaſion.

III. Another very ſtriking effect produced in the Apoſtles by the Spirit of God, was that undaunted courage which bore them up againſt all oppoſition, in his ſervice. Formerly they were weakneſs and cowardice itſelf. At the time of the paſſion of their Lord, the chief of them was ſo terrified at a queſtion put to him by the ſervant of the High Prieſt, that he denied any knowledge of him, whom he had ſo lately ſworn never to abandon. In that hour of trial they all deſerted him, and conceal-

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ed themſelves from the face of his enemies. Now, ſtrangers to fear, they preſent themſelves before the people, and reproach them to their faces with the moſt horrible crime that was ever committed: "You have crucified, they ſay, the juſt, the Holy One, the Meſſias ſent from God, the Redeemer of the world." The magiſtrates and doctors of the law, alarmed at this liberty, which they term inſolence and ſedition, cauſe them to be apprehended. They go with joy to the tribunal, and there repeat what they had before aſſerted; they declare, with unſhaken conſtancy, that they will obey God rather than men; and return from the preſence of the Council, *rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to ſuffer reproach for the name of Jeſus.* (Acts v.) They are threatened with death.—Pitiful menace! 'Tis what they wiſh: they long to die for Jeſus. If they find not death for his cauſe in their own country, they are determined

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to go in ſearch of it, even to the ends of the earth.

The ſame intrepidity and ſtrength of mind is conſpicuous in all thoſe who have received the Holy Ghoſt. If they want opportunities to diſplay theſe qualities in oppreſſion and perſecution for the name of Jeſus, they exert them in the various occurrences of life, by the ſteady and uniform practice of Chriſtian virtues; in receiving affronts; in forgiving injuries; in curbing impetuous paſſions; in ſacrificing eaſe, repoſe, and ſenſual indulgence; in ſubmiſſion, ſilence, obedience, and humility. A Chriſtian, having put on the armour of God, and bearing in his hand the ſword of the Spirit, braves the moſt formidable aſſaults of his enemies.

Guided, therefore, by theſe principles, my beloved, if we were aſked the ſame queſtion which St. Paul put to the Epheſians: *Having believed, have you received the Holy Ghoſt?* what anſwer ſhould

ſhould we be able to make? Alas! we tremble at the very ſhadow of oppoſition. How much muſt we ſtruggle to get the better of a human reſpect, to brook an affront, to bear patiently an affliction, to ſubmit to any humiliation! How cruel a ſacrifice does it appear to us, to deny ourſelves a ſenſual gratification, to retrench an ornament of vanity, or any refinement of luxury? And are theſe the marks which the Holy Ghoſt gives of his preſence? Indeed, my friends, if this be your character, you have not yet received this promiſed gift. But, if you have not received it, it is becauſe you have not aſked for it with fervent and perſeverant deſires. The Spirit of God delights to be with the children of men. Oh! then, if it be but our delight to be with him, we cannot be ſeparated from him.

Pray, therefore, now, in pious union with all the ſervants of God diſperſed throughout the world; pray, that this

divine

divine Spirit may ſhed upon your ſouls the beams of his enlivening grace, which will diſperſe every cloud of error, diſſolve the charms of worldly vanity, and ſoften, melt, and inflame our hearts with divine love. He is the Father of the poor: beg of him to relieve your ſpiritual poverty, by ſhowering down upon you his gifts and graces. He is the fountain of living waters: humbly entreat him to flow into your ſouls, and extinguiſh the ardours of concupiſcence with his cooling ſtreams. He will not diſregard your petitions. Jeſus was made man, and ſpilt his blood, that each individual of this aſſembly might receive the Holy Ghoſt. This is the object of all his wiſhes, the end of all his labours, to deſtroy in us the ſpirit of corruption; to give us a new heart and a new ſoul; to form us to a ſecond birth, more fortunate by far, and more excellent than our firſt nativity; to create in us the new man, which is according to God in juſtice, ſanctity, and truth;

truth; to make us ſons of God, and co-heirs with himſelf in a bliſsful immortality.

SERMON

SERMON XXXII.

TRINITY SUNDAY.

On the Incomprehenſibility of ſome Doctrines of the Chriſtian Religion.

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wiſdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehenſible are his judgements, and how unſearchable his ways! Rom. xi. 33.

WELL might the Apoſtle, when he contemplated the ſublime and myſterious doctrines of the Chriſtian religion, and the wonderful diſpenſations of God's providence in calling men to the knowledge of truth, and to the love of their ſovereign good—well indeed might he thus feelingly expreſs his admiration of

of that eternal mind, which comprehends truths impenetrable to our reaſon, and which ſo utterly confound the pride of the human heart. Of this nature is the myſtery propoſed to our attention this day, when we are called upon by the Church publicly to profeſs our belief of that incomprehenſible, at the ſame time fundamental, article of the Chriſtian faith, the Unity of the Deity ſubſiſting in a Trinity of Perſons —Perſons, each of them really diſtinct from the other, while they are ſtill but one and the ſame God. What can I ſay, my brethren, in order to convey to your minds a juſt conception of that which is beyond all mortal knowledge? —Vain would be the attempt. Only the divine Jeſus, in whom were all the treaſures of heavenly wiſdom, he, in whom the fulneſs of the Divinity dwelt, he alone upon earth had comprehenſive knowledge of this myſterious truth, which he firſt brought clearly to light: —but for us, our feeble minds, our

limited conceptions, cannot reach it. Be it our part, therefore, to bow down in ſilence, and adore; firmly fixed, as on a rock, on the authority of him who cannot deceive; and awaiting that happier moment, when the veil ſhall be drawn aſide; when we, who now ſee through a glaſs darkly, ſhall ſee God face to face, and know him as he is in himſelf. Here we muſt hold, my friends, and ſuſpend our curious enquiries. *We have*, ſays St. Peter, *the more firm prophetical word*, that is, the Revelation by the Goſpel, *whereunto you do well to attend, as to a light that ſhineth in a dark place; until the day dawn, and the day-ſtar ariſe in your hearts.* (2. Pet. i.) Should we now preſumptuouſly aſpire to the anticipation of that knowledge which is reſerved to be diſcloſed to our minds in a future world, we ſhall be bewildered and loſt in an intricate maze of error and folly.

However, the incomprehenſibility of this myſtery of the Trinity, and of ſome other

other of the doctrines of Chriſtianity, has been in every age a ſcandal to the Pagan, to the Jew, and to the Infidel of every denomination; it ſo diſguſted ſome of the diſciples of Jeſus, when he converſed among men, that they withdrew their confidence from him. Many of them *ſaid: This ſaying is hard, and who can hear it?* And *after this many of his diſciples went back, and walked no more with him.* (John vi.) We learn from St. Paul, that the Jews and Gentiles urged the ſame difficulty againſt his preaching. And in ſucceeding times almoſt every adverſary of the Chriſtian name, from Celſus the philoſopher, the firſt diſtinguiſhed opponent of the Goſpel, down to the Deiſts and unbelievers of this age, has ſtrenuouſly enforced the ſame argument, and endeavoured to prove that doctrines ſo impenetrable to human reaſon, cannot be revelations from Heaven: and muſt conſequently be numbered among the fruits of illuſion, or the artifices of impoſture.

My deſign therefore, this day, is to give an anſwer to this argument, at the ſame time that I endeavoured to confirm you in your faith, and ſhew you the advantages you are to derive from it. Firſt, thereſore, I will undertake to demonſtrate, that the incomprehenſibility of the doctrines of Chriſtianity, inſtead of being an objection againſt their credibility, is in truth one of the beſt proofs that they are of divine origin. Secondly: I will lay before you ſome of the reaſons, which moved the Almighty to reveal his truths thus obſcurely to mankind. That done, I will point out ſome practical leſſons to be learned from the particular myſtery of this day.

I. I have juſt obſerved, that the incomprehenſibility of many myſteries of the Chriſtian Religion has been, in every age, a ſcandal to the Jew, and a folly to the Gentile and unbeliever. Indeed, in this particular, the Chriſtian profeſſion is entirely ſingular, and differs widely from every other. Never did a philoſo-

philoſopher or legiſlator profeſs to embrace doctrines, which at the ſame time he declared he could not comprehend: nor would he have been liſtened to with common patience, if, after ſuch a declaration, he had attempted to recommend them to others. This was never attempted by any but Chriſtians. The Apoſtles preached every where, and with a conſtancy not to be diſconcerted by ridicule, or ſhaken by oppoſition, truths which they ingenuouſly confeſſed they could not fathom. They called their doctrines *a myſtery hidden from eternity in God; incomprehenſible judgements, unſearchable ways*, (Epeſ. iii.) as in the words of my text. They taught that which *eye* had *not ſeen, nor ear heard*: (1 Cor. ii.) and they braved the moſt excruciating tortures, and ſpilt their blood, in defence of theſe impenetrable tenets. Strange and unheard-of conduct, my brethren!—But ſtrange as it is, and diſguſtingly abſurd as it may appear to the modern infidel, the Apoſ-

tle of the Gentiles did not heſitate to draw from that very circumſtance an invincible argument in favour of the divine origin of the truths he delivered. *We ſpeak*, ſays he, writing to the Corinthians, *we ſpeak the wiſdom of God in a myſtery, a wiſdom which is hidden..... which none of the princes of this world knew....which eye hath not ſeen....but to us God hath revealed it by his ſpirit. For the Spirit ſearcheth all things, even the deep things of God.* As if he had ſaid, the doctrines we deliver are dark and impenetrable to the human mind; conſequently, they cannot be the fruit of our invention, the productions of our wit and genius: therefore, only the Spirit of God can be the author of them. And he goes on appealing to common ſenſe to determine on the force of this argument. *What man*, ſays he, *knoweth the things of a man, but the ſpirit of a man that is in him? So the things alſo that are of God no* man *knoweth, but the Spirit of* God.

That I may throw a clearer light on this reaſoning of the Apoſtle, I muſt deſire you to obſerve, my brethren, that, in the firſt place, theſe myſteries could not be invented by man; becauſe, as it is readily allowed, the moſt acute powers of reaſon could not have led to the diſcovery of them by any chain of arguments; ſo abſtruſe is their nature, and ſo far removed from the reach of our mental faculties. And, for the ſame reaſon, the moſt lively fancy, or heated imagination, could not have deviſed or figured them to itſelf; becauſe it is impoſſible the imagination ſhould be employed about any other objects, but ſuch as are either perceptible to the ſenſes, or comprehended by the underſtanding. And ſurely it would be abſurd to maintain, that a man can invent that of which he himſelf can form no juſt conception; or to ſuppoſe that he ſhould not underſtand the productions of his own mind.

In the ſecond place, if theſe myſteries could poſſibly have been inventions of human fancy, they are ſo contrary to men's ideas, and ſo oppoſed to their diſpoſitions, that they never could have obtained any credit in the world. No one would have made his religion conſiſt in believing them, had they not been ſupported by divine authority. There is not perhaps any paſſion more ſtrongly rivetted in the heart of man, than pride, and a love of independence in exerciſing his judgement. Men love to judge for themſelves. They will yield their aſſent to truths which their reaſon diſcovers: but, blindly to ſubmit to the deciſions of others, is what they cannot brook; and eſpecially, to embrace, on the authority of others, doctrines and tenets which are incomprehenſible, and which they who teach them, confeſs they do not underſtand, would be accounted the moſt evident proof of mental imbecility.

Yes,

Yet, my Chriſtian friends, a few illiterate fiſhermen, every way unqualified to invent religious tenets, without art, without eloquence, without authority, preached theſe myſteries; and the myſteries they preached were ſhortly after credited by the moſt enlightened part of the whole world. The wiſdom of the Philoſophers, the perſuaſive powers of the Orators, nay, the whole force of the Roman Empire, combined againſt them, proved unable to ſtop their progreſs. To what cauſe muſt we attribute this aſtoniſhing revolution; doubtleſs, to the operation of the Deity, to the power of the Moſt High. They were his truths, therefore, and their incomprehenſible nature places it beyond a doubt. Yes, my brethren, when you find yourſelves tempted to doubt the truth of the divine doctrines thus myſteriouſly revealed to you, only reflect by whom they were taught; by weak and ſimple men:—to whom; to the members of the moſt enlightened and

moſt flouriſhing empire in the world: —with what ſucceſs; ſo as to bear down all oppoſition; to triumph over every obſtacle; and make the croſs, which had been hitherto a badge of ſhame and infamy, the nobleſt ornament in the diadems of the Princes of the earth. Reflect on that, and your difficulties will vaniſh: you will cry out, the finger of God is here; you will captivate your underſtanding to the obedience of faith, and adore, with profound humility, *the depths of the wiſdom and knowledge of God.*

Having now ſhewn you, that the impenetrable nature of our myſteries is the confirmation of your faith, I proceed to lay before you ſome reaſons why the truths of heaven are thus obſcurely revealed to us.

II. The infinite nature and attributes of the Deity are ſo far removed from our finite and imperfect nature, that every thing in him muſt be to us incomprehenſible. When the human mind

mind contemplates that eternal ſource of truth, life, wiſdom, beauty, and perfection; overcome by the greatneſs of the object, it ſinks down in paſſive helpleſſneſs, and muſt content itſelf with calm belief and ſilent adoration. Hence the Almighty is repreſented by the Prophets as ſeated on a high throne, enveloped in clouds of majeſty, which intercept all mortal ſight. Even the Seraphs who ſurround his throne, are ſaid to veil their faces, overcome by the dazzling brightneſs which beams from his countenance. Thoſe celeſtial ſpirits cannot comprehend the infinite perfections of their Maker: and were we endowed with all the faculties ever beſtowed on the higheſt orders of created beings, we never ſhould comprehend them, our conceptions would ſtill be as far from adequate to what God is, as finite is from infinite. Could we comprehend him, he would ceaſe to be what he is, or we ſhould be raiſed to an equality with him; both which are

equally impoſſible. Hence, according to a fine obſervation of St. Auguſtin, all that we properly know of God is, that he is incomprehenſible. It evidently therefore is not poſſible his myſteries ſhould be accommodated to our capacities. In a future life, indeed, we ſhall ſee them far more clearly than we now can do, encompaſſed, as we are, with theſe mortal bodies; but even then we ſhall not perfectly penetrate his eternal nature.

But, it may be aſked, why were we not permitted to know, at leaſt as much of them as we can know here upon earth? I anſwer, that our divine Redeemer, by thus withholding his myſteries from our view, hath conſulted the dignity of the Religion which he hath taught mankind, and the utility of thoſe who believe in him. It is a common and well-known weakneſs of human nature to undervalue, and think very ſlightingly of thoſe things with which we are familiar, or which are eaſily attained, while we admire and eſteem

teem that which cannot be arrived at without great labour and difficulty.—With wiſdom therefore did our Redeemer contrive, that his divine truths ſhould be involved in thoſe ſhades which would give them majeſty, and ſecure our reſpect and reverence. By the ſame unſearchable depth of his doctrines, he had an eye to our advantage alſo; ſince by it he hath provided a remedy for the two moſt dangerous infirmities of our corrupt nature. Our greateſt evils are, an innate pride, and a vain curioſity. Theſe were the paſſions which ruined our firſt parents; they ſought to be like unto God, knowing good and evil: and from the ſame empoiſoned ſources have been derived all the errors and crimes which have prevailed on the earth. Each one feels within himſelf an inordinate appetite for liberty and independence, not in acting only, but in judging particularly. We are fond of eſtabliſhing our own reaſon, as the criterion of truth, in every inſtance. It was neceſſary to extirpate

this evil root, or prevent it from ſpreading in our hearts. And no way could this be better done, than by giving us ſo much inſight into the infinite wiſdom of God, as might confound the pride of human reaſon, prove the wiſdom of this world to be a folly, and ſubject every preſumptuous judgement of ours to the obedience of faith. By this means we make to God a ſacrifice of our reaſon, the moſt noble part of our being; a ſacrifice which he hath the ſtricteſt right to demand: and by making it, we perform the moſt arduous, the moſt heroic, and conſequently the moſt meritorious act of Religion. *Without faith*, ſays St. Paul, *it is impoſſible to pleaſe God.* (Heb. xi.) And what is faith, my beloved, but to aſſent to truths which our reaſon cannot diſcover?

I come now to ſome practical reflections on the adorable myſtery of this day.

III. You believe, my beloved, you believe the incomprehenſible myſtery of the

the Unity and Trinity of God. Your very name of Chriſtian implies ſuch belief. You diſregard the murmurings of proud reaſon, which ſometimes break out in oppoſition to it. I doubt not, that you feel yourſelves determined rather to ſpill your blood, and ſacrifice life itſelf, than deny your belief of this adorable myſtery. You frequently ſay to your God, when you make an act of faith, that you would rather die than renounce your belief in him. But, my brethren, do you know the anſwer which the Almighty makes to you? "No: he ſays, you are not called upon now to die for your faith. The edifice of religion was in the beginning to be cemented by the blood of the Apoſtles and Martyrs: but now, that Chriſtianity is eſtabliſhed, it is not by the fiery ordeal of perſecution that your faith is to be tried, but amidſt the ſnares and dangers of peace and tranquillity. I do not now call you to declare your profeſſion on the ſcaffold and the wheel: but I require you to ſhow

forth your faith in all the ordinary actions and common occurrences of life.— Judges and tyrants do not in these days extort from you a confession of your religious principles: but, confess, and make them manifest, by your good conduct in the circle of friends, acquaintances, and fellow-citizens, with whom you are united. Think not on what you would do if a persecution should be raised: but now, that you can declare yourselves, let your virtues, let the sanctity of your lives, let the purity and innocence of your manners, let every excellent, every kind and amiable quality in you, speak you to be my disciples." Yes, my friends, thus you are to profess your faith. Walk worthily of that God whom you serve. *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, who is in Heaven.* (Mat. v.) Indeed, my brethren, it too often happens, that we are only fondly amusing ourselves, when we form those resolutions of dying for our faith, in case

the hour of trial ſhould come. What—you adhere to your faith with the inſtruments of torture before your eyes, with a cruel death ſtaring you in the face—you, who ſo often deviate from the practice of the virtues it enjoins, even in peace and calmneſs! ah! do not imagine it. You perhaps deſert your faith each day and each hour; and, what is more to be lamented, you deſert it for a vile intereſt, a momentary pleaſure, the gratifying of a depraved appetite, a baſe deſire, a ſhameful paſſion; in ſpeculation, fervent and courageous, braving dangers which never preſent themſelves, while nothing real is put in execution. The good which might and ſhould now be done, is ever deferred till ſome future period, and the preſent is filled up with actions directly oppoſite to the virtues which your faith requires of you.

Our faith in the three divine Perſons of the adorable Trinity is the foundation of all our hopes, the ſource of our merits, the principle of our holineſs, and the begin-

beginning and the root of our juſtification. It is the ſmall ſeed mentioned in the Goſpel, which, taking root in the heart, at length ſhoots forth branches which reach the higheſt heavens, and will bear thoſe delicious fruits which we are to gather throughout eternity. It is on this account, that the words by which we generally expreſs it, *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt*, are, and have ever been, conſidered in our Religion, as moſt ſacred, auguſt, and venerable. By the appointment of our divine Redeemer, theſe words enter into the adminiſtration of all the ſacraments of the new law. If we are regenerated by the ſaving waters of Baptiſm, it is in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt. If we are ſtrengthened by divine grace in Confirmation; if our ſins are remitted in the Sacrament of Penance; if we are conſecrated for the Miniſtry of the Goſpel; all this is done in the name of the ſame moſt holy and adorable Trinity. The ſame

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ſacred name is invoked when we receive a bleſſing from the Paſtors and Prelates of the Church. And when we announce to you the words of eternal life, we begin always by acknowledging our dependence on the Father, who is the ſource of truth and wiſdom, the Son, who brought life and immortality to light, and the Holy Ghoſt, whoſe grace and influence alone can make theſe truths fructify in our hearts; in order that we may ever remember that Chriſtianity brings with it no bleſſing, no juſtification or ſalvation, but by faith in the bleſſed Trinity./

For the ſame reaſon, my brethren, was introduced that pious practice of never beginning or executing any work of importance, without ſigning ourſelves with the ſign of the croſs, and pronouncing thoſe ſacred words. We acknowledge by that practice, that the merit of the action we perform muſt be derived from our faith; and that, without it, our labours would be fruitleſs, and of no eſti-

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mation in the ſight of God. The firſt Chriſtians, as we learn from Tertullian, made conſtant uſe of the ſign of the croſs: he informs us, that on every occaſion, and in every occupation of life, at their going out or coming in, at their getting up or lying down, at their meals, at their buſineſs, they made this ſacred ſign on their foreheads. Of this practice the Catholic Church has been ever tenacious. I know that weak and uninformed perſons, empty and ſuperficial reaſoners, light and giddy minds, affect a ſneer, and laugh at ſuch a practice. But we regard not their deriſion. If ridicule were the teſt of truth, then every thing moſt ſacred muſt be rejected. Surely, in the eye of unprejudiced reaſon, nothing can be more conformable to the ſpirit of a Chriſtian, nothing more immediately directed to the glory of our Creator, than to enter upon each action by invoking his adorable name, and imprinting on our foreheads the glorious ſign of our Redemption. Hence alſo the Church of

Chriſt

Chriſt is ever careful to cloſe all the inſpired hymns and canticles, which ſhe ſings to her divine Spouſe, with the Doxology, or *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghoſt:* and with the ſame divine theme ſhe terminates all her hymns and prayers.

Here, my brethren, I will take occaſion to introduce a reflexion, which hitherto, perhaps, may have eſcaped your attention. Every time that you pronounce the ſacred words which accompany the ſign of the croſs; or repeat, the *Glory be to the Father*, &c. you perform one of the higheſt acts of devotion. Thoſe words are in reality ſo many acts of faith, hope, and charity; as they immediately tend to give glory to the great Author of your faith, the foundation of all your hopes, and the great object of your love. When you repeat them, you aſſociate yourſelves with the celeſtial ſpirits, whoſe eternal occupation and delight is to give glory to the bleſſed Trinity. You join your voice here below

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in harmony with theirs, and prepare yourſelves to ſing with them eternal canticles of praiſe and joy. Ah! what merit might you accumulate to yourſelves! What graces might you bring down upon your ſouls, did you always repeat theſe words with true and heart-felt devotion! Surely, you did not reflect, or you would not have pronounced theſe ſacred prayers with that diſſipated mind, that wandering imagination; with thoughts taken up with every trifling object: you would not have run them over as a mere form; or made the ſign of the croſs with that hurry and precipitation, which make it appear, in the eyes of an uninformed ſpectator, rather like a ridiculous geſticulation, than an act of religious worſhip. No, my brethren, if you be filled with a juſt idea of the majeſty of that divine Being whoſe ſacred name you pronounce, there will appear in your countenance, and in your geſtures, as there will be in your heart and mind, that reverential awe, tempered with filial love, which becomes

comes a creature in his intercourſe with his Creator. The name of God, of the three Perſons of the adorable Trinity, is a divine name, a name of glory and majeſty, a name terrible to the powers of darkneſs; a name ſo great, and at the ſame time ſo ſweet, ſo amiable, ſo endearing, that we ſhould be overwhelmed with grief and confuſion, to think that ever it paſſed our lips, while our minds and hearts refuſed to accompany it.

To animate yourſelves to greater fervour in your adorations of the bleſſed Trinity, remember, that the time will come, when theſe ſacred names of Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, which you now ſo often pronounce with the utmoſt inattention, will be all your comfort and conſolation. Look forward, my brethren, to that formidable hour, when you will lie ſtretched out on the bed of death. The Miniſter of God, in thoſe laſt moments, will come to comfort and ſupport your agonizing ſoul. And what are the comforts he will adminiſter? Ah! he will

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repeat to you the ſweet names of the divine perſons in the bleſſed Trinity. "Go forth," he will ſay, "go forth, Chriſtian ſoul, from this world, in the name of the Father Almighty, who created thee; in the name of Jeſus Chriſt, the Son of the living God, who ſuffered for thee; in the name of the Holy Ghoſt, who hath been poured forth upon thee." The terror of theſe names will put to flight the legions of evil ſpirits which may hover round your bed, defeat all their attempts, confound their inſidious arts, and guard you ſecurely to the abodes of reſt and peace. Again, the moſt powerful argument he will make uſe of in pleading for mercy to be ſhown you at the throne of God, will be your faith and devotion to the adorable Trinity. "O Lord," he will pray, "we commend to thee the ſoul of this thy ſervant....Own him for thy creature, not made by any ſtrange Gods, but by thee, the only living and true God....Make his ſoul to rejoice in thy preſence; and remember not

not his former iniquities and exceſſes, the effects of paſſion or evil concupiſcence; for, although he hath ſinned, he hath not renounced the Father, Son, or Holy Ghoſt; but believed, and had zeal for God, and faithfully worſhipped him, who made all things." Oh! would to God, my brethren, your faith and devotion to the bleſſed Trinity may be ſuch through life, as then to give you this true conſolation, when every human comfort fails you!

SERMON

SERMON XXXIII.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

On the Effects produced by a worthy Participation of the Sacred Myſteries.

A certain man made a great ſupper, and invited many; and he ſent his ſervants at ſupper-time, to ſay to them that were invited, that they ſhould come, for now all things are ready. Luke xiv. 16.

"O SACRED banquet! in which "Chriſt is received, the memory of his "paſſion is renewed, the mind is reple-"niſhed with grace, and a pledge is "given us of future glory!" This pious ejaculation is frequently repeated by the Catholic Church in theſe days of ſpiritual joy. The banquet here ſpoken of, my bre-

brethren, is the moſt excellent, the moſt ſalutary, the moſt ſweet and delicious of all banquets. It contains truth, life, and grace itſelf: it contains Jeſus in perſon, the author of ſanctity, the ſource of happineſs. Well indeed is it called a *great ſupper*. The food here ſet before us is the bread of Angels: the invited to eat of it are the whole Chriſtian world: the maſter of the feaſt is the eternal word of God, *the brightneſs of* the Father's *glory, and the figure of his ſubſtance.* (Heb. i.) He has commanded the gates of his temples, where this divine feaſt is ſerved up, to be thrown open to all the world; and with tender ſolicitude he invites and preſſes all to come, to ſit down at his table, and be filled with bleſſings.

Now types and figures have paſſed away; the ſhadows of future good things have diſappeared before the light of the Sun of truth and juſtice, who hath ſhed his enlivening rays on the earth in theſe our happier days. You are not now to partake of the ſacrifice offered by the High

High Prieſt Melchiſedec; you are not to be ſupported by the manna which was rained down from the clouds, in the deſert, before the people of God; no longer are we commanded to eat the Paſchal Lamb, as the ſign of our deliverance and redemption. Theſe illuſtrious figures, theſe myſterious rites and ceremonies, were great and venerable, only becauſe they pointed out the banquet to which we are called. He whom they announced to us, is come. *Take ye and eat*, ſays our divine Redeemer; *this is my body.* (Mat. xxvi.) Yes, my beloved friends, this is the true victim of redemption; this the body which was immolated for you on the croſs; this the blood which flowed ſo plentifully for you on Mount Calvary, and now pleads your cauſe before the throne of God. *Take ye and eat*; be nouriſhed to immortal life; for, *if any man eat of this bread, he ſhall live for ever.* (John vi.)

That we might not be unhappily inſenſible to the love which Jeſus hath ſhown

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us in this myſtery; that we might not deprive our ſouls of the bleſſings it contains; the Church at this time, by the inſtitution of a ſolemn feſtival in honour of the divine banquet, awakens our feelings to this love, and calls our attention to theſe bleſſings. At all times, your Saviour ſends his ſervants to invite men to his great ſupper; and he hath given it in charge to me alſo, to exhort and excite his people, and particularly you, my brethren, to whom I have an opportunity of addreſſing myſelf, to approach frequently to his holy table. Ah! my friends, would to God I may ſucceed in this! That I may at leaſt endeavour to do it, it is my intention to lay before you this day ſome of the admirable and truly deſirable effects which this ſacrament will produce in your ſouls, if worthily and frequently received. In the firſt place, I mean to point it out to you as the grand ſupport of a virtuous life, and the nouriſhment of the ſoul to immortality: ſecondly, as a continual remembrancer

of all the virtues which Jeſus, the divine model of perfection, exhibited in his mortal life for your example. To me it will give heart-felt pleaſure, and it will indeed be a happineſs for you, if I can treat this important ſubject in ſuch a manner as to make you conceive a hunger and thirſt, a longing after this life-giving food, and make the frequent participation of it the higheſt enjoyment of your lives.

I. We muſt obſerve that, beſides the general graces annexed to all the ſacraments, each of them in particular produces effects in the ſoul, which are peculiar to itſelf. Thus, by the waters of Baptiſm, we are regenerated, and made adopted children of God: in Confirmation we are enliſted under the banners of Chriſt, and invigorated by the Holy Ghoſt: at the tribunal of Penance we are cleanſed from our iniquities, and purified by the blood of the Lamb. *There are diverſities of graces,* ſays St. Paul, *but the ſame Spirit...And there are diverſities*

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of operations, but the ſame God, who worketh all in all. (1 Cor. xii.) Now the peculiar effect of the bleſſed Euchariſt, is to ſupport and nouriſh the ſoul to eternal life. It was for this reaſon, that our Divine Saviour, who could communicate his graces to us by any method he ſhould chooſe, was pleaſed to impart himſelf to us under the form of bread; giving us to underſtand, that, as the corporal food which we take maintains the health and vigour of the body, repairs the defects which are variouſly occaſioned in the natural ſyſtem, and ſupplies the ſprings of life and ſtrength; in the ſame manner this bread of Angels invigorates the ſoul, repairs the defects cauſed by our concupiſcence, and nouriſhes our ſpiritual life with conſtant ſupplies of Divine Grace, till we grow up to that meaſure of perfection, which is attainable only in a future ſtate.

This diſtinctive and admirable property of the bleſſed Euchariſt, is painted out to us under a beautiful image in the

Old Teſtament. We read in the firſt book of Kings, that the prophet Elias, flying from the fury of the impious Queen Jezebel, who had determined on his deſtruction, went a day's journey into the wilderneſs, and came and ſat down down under a juniper-tree: there, fatigued with his wearisome journey, dejected by the ill ſucceſs of his miniſtry, and almoſt broken hearted by diſtreſs and anguiſh, without a friend to relieve him, or even commiſerate his hard lot, *he deſired that he might die; and ſaid, it is now enough, O Lord, take my ſoul; for I am no better than my fathers.* While he ſat in this penſive and melancholy ſtate, *behold, now an Angel touched him, and ſaid unto him, Ariſe and eat: and when he looked about, behold, there was a cake.... and...water at his head...And the Angel of the Lord came again the ſecond time, and touched him, and ſaid, Ariſe and eat, for thou haſt a great journey* to go through. *Then he aroſe, and did eat and drink, and walked in the ſtrength of that food, forty*

days

days and forty nights, unto Horeb, the mountain of God; where he was favoured with a viſion of the Lord.

You have, my friends, in this hiſtory, an accurate and fine repreſentation of your condition and mine in this mortal life. We alſo are travelling through a wilderneſs, through a vale of ſorrows, in which we are ſtrangers and pilgrims, purſuing our way towards the holy mountain where God dwells, towards our true country, the abode of peace and joy, where we ſhall be favoured and bleſſed with the viſion of the Lord, with the clear ſight and poſſeſſion of our ſovereign good. Our great care and ſolicitude muſt be to eſcape the violence and fury of the enemies who ſeek our ruin, and lie in wait for us in our paſſage through life. We have many ſuch enemies, my beloved; the deluſive maxims of worldly wiſdom prepare many ſnares before us to entrap our unwary feet. The fleſh, with its flattering allurements, invites us to the embraces of guilt and miſery,

decked out in all the various counterfeit forms of pleaſure and happineſs. The fiery darts of the princes of darkneſs are likewiſe pointed againſt us. Ah! too frequently, like the prophet in the wilderneſs, we are almoſt wearied out with the conteſt, are ready to ſuccumb under the weight of our difficulties, and give up the cauſe of virtue: too often overpowered by the raging heat of concupiſcence, we faint, we lie lifeleſs on the ground, an eaſy conqueſt to every temptation; or lulled by the faſcinating charms of ſloth and indolence, we ſleep ſupinely in the very arms of our enemies.

But, oh! my friends, we may yet be comforted. Ariſe: Jeſus hath mercifully provided for our ſupport: he hath placed a table before us, and commands us, not by the miniſtry of an Angel, but with his own ſacred mouth, to ariſe and eat; and promiſes, that, if we nouriſh our ſouls with the divine food he hath prepared for us, we ſhall be ſtrengthened; we ſhall be enabled to purſue our jour-

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ney, amidſt ſurrounding dangers, with ſecurity, eaſe, and alacrity; and come at length to the term of our deſires. Give an attentive ear to his own divine words: *I am the living bread which came down from Heaven. If any man eat of this bread he ſhall live for ever: and the bread that I will give, is my fleſh for the life of the world... As the living father hath ſent me, and I live by the Father, ſo he that eateth me, the ſame alſo ſhall live by me. This is the bread that came down from Heaven:—not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth this bread ſhall live for ever.* (John vi.) Again, my brethren, in how tender and engaging a manner does he invite us to approach to him! *Come to me,* ſays he, *come to me, all you that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refreſh you;* come, *and you ſhall find reſt to your ſouls.* (Mat. xi.) Let not your infirmities and your weakneſſes diſhearten you, and deter you from coming to partake of this life-giving food. It is to

the weak, it is to the infirm, that I addreſs this invitation: *come, all you that labour, and are heavy laden.* Here you will be inflamed by that charity which makes every burthen light, that charity which ſweetens every labour; this is the bread of conſolation; the bread of power and ſtrength.

Come then, you among my preſent hearers who labour under great temptations; you who find a ſource of corruption within your breaſts, which preſſes you down to the earth with an almoſt irreſiſtible force, and makes all your affections bend towards the enjoyment of ſenſual gratifications; approach frequently to this ſacred table: the bread you here receive will counteract all the efforts of a vitiated ſelf-love, and raiſe your immortal ſouls to higher purſuits, to the purſuit of thoſe noble objects for which they were originally formed. Come, you that are deluded and blinded by the falſe maxims of the world, to the ruin of your innocence and your peace;

come

come to Jeſus in this myſtery: here a ray of divine light will dart upon your mind, and diſſipate every cloud of error and falſehood. Come, you that are puffed up by the pride of proſperity; whoſe hearts are enchanted by the gaudy trappings of vanity, or eagerly intent on procuring every refinement of luxury: here you may learn to ſet a due value on all that paſſes with time, and make the firſt and warmeſt wiſhes of your hearts be fixed on the attainment of more permanent and ſubſtantial bleſſings, the nobler ornaments of virtue and holineſs, and the good things which the Lord hath prepared for his elect in a future life. You likewiſe, whom poverty deprives of many of the enjoyments of this life; you, to whom the world preſents a darker aſpect, come, and be no longer diſheartened by the diſadvantages of your lowly condition; come, and make Jeſus your friend, be united to him. With him you have all things; you may taſte a pleaſure which the world, in its bright-

eſt days, could never impart to its moſt-favoured votaries: you may enjoy a ſunſhine of content, and a peace which ſurpaſſeth all underſtanding. *Come to me: come, all you that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refreſh you.*

Holy David, whoſe prophetic ſpirit carried him forward into the regions of futurity, and placed before him a diſtinct view of all the bleſſings which our Redeemer would bring with him to the earth, thus deſcribes, as in his own perſon, the fortunate condition of thoſe who are united to Jeſus in this myſtery of love. *The Lord,* ſays he, *is my ſhepherd, and nothing ſhall be wanting to me:* (Pſ. xxii.) he hath conducted me into green paſtures abounding with flowers and fruits, and placed me on the banks of refreſhing ſtreams. Then, expreſſing his lively confidence in that divine goodneſs which he had already ſo often experienced, he declares, that even death, that formidable ſpectre which damps all the joys of men, brings with it no terror to him:

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Though I ſhould walk in the midſt of the ſhadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. Oh! my friends, the hour will come, when your heart may rejoice in this confidence. In thoſe trying moments which announce your approaching diſſolution; when ſtanding on the confines of two worlds, on the brink of an awful eternity, you ſhall turn pale, and ſhudder at the proſpect before you; when the bitter remembrance of former crimes ſhall crowd on your mind and be a torture to your ſoul; oh! Jeſus will viſit you himſelf in perſon, and ſmooth your bed of ſorrows; he will enter into your breaſt, calm your tumultuous ſoul, ſupport you in that agonizing ſtate; and then, your will cheerfully reſign your ſoul into his hands, with ſecure and triumphant hope: then you will ſing with the Royal Prophet, *Thy rod and thy ſtaff, they have comforted me: thou haſt prepared for me a table,* to give me power to ſtruggle *againſt thoſe who afflict me: thou haſt anointed my*

head with oil; and my overflowing chalice, how delicious, *how exquiſite it is!* Theſe are the admirable effects of this heavenly food; it ſupports us under the preſſure of affliction, conducts us ſecurely through the perils of life, arms us againſt the terrors of death, and is a ſure pledge of our future and immortal felicity.

But, methinks I hear you ſay: "Frequently I have partaken of this bread of Angels; yet I diſcover not, that into my ſoul, thoſe bleſſings have flowed from it, which you deſcribe. Indeed, in the moment when I receive my Saviour into my breaſt, I feel myſelf tenderly affected; divine love then ſeems to hold dominion in my heart: but thoſe emotions are ſhort and tranſitory, and the impreſſions then made are quickly effaced. When I return from it, I find that my deſires are ſtill earthly, my inclinations ſtill grovelling among ſenſual ſatisfactions, my reſolutions feeble and fluctuating, eaſily carried away by every wind of temptation." Ah! Chriſtian brother,

brother, how came it that you reaped ſo little fruit from it? To what cauſe muſt we attribute this failure? Is the fountain of grace dried up? Is the power of Jeſus diminiſhed? Or does he bear leſs love to you, than to the moſt favoured of his ſervants? Certainly not. The blood, which he ſo freely ſpilt for the ſalvation of every individual among mankind, is a clear, a convincing proof of it. No: the diſpoſitions you brought with you muſt have been the ſole cauſe of your misfortune. Did you prove yourſelves? Were you ſincere in your endeavours to purify your hearts from the defilements of ſin, before you eat of this bread? Examine into this matter.—If not, no wonder you were not benefited by it. An unworthy Communion converts the bread of life into a deadly poiſon, which preys on the very vitals of the ſoul for eternity: the ſevereſt vengeance of Heaven is not too great to puniſh ſo execrable a crime.

But God forbid you ſhould have been thus wretched and impious! I will not ſuppoſe it. But, after uſing every means to cleanſe your ſoul from the infection of ſin, ſtill, you ſay, "I taſte not that ſweetneſs, I do not experience thoſe comforts." My brethren, the favours of Heaven are always diſpenſed to us in proportion to the deſire and fervour of ſoul with which we ſeek after them. If you had not a lively faith, a firm hope, and a longing after this divine food; if your appetite ſtill craved after the dainties of Egypt; if you dealt ungeneroufly with your God; if you approached him with diſtaſte and reluctance; if you were diſpoſed to do no more for his ſervice, than you thought you muſt do to ſecure your own intereſts—that is, to avoid only mortal ſin, and deliberately indulge yourſelf in habits of venial offences: if that be the caſe, is it to be wondered at, that the Lord ſhould impart his graces to you with a ſparing hand, and puniſh your coldneſs and indifference

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towards him, by depriving you of the ſweets of his preſence? Indeed, this is not any way ſurpriſing, my brethren. Beſides, if one Communion produced leſs abundant fruits, that might have been a preparation for another, which would have brought you a ſtill more copious ſupply of the graces of Heaven. But, perhaps you only approach once a year to this table; and would not then preſent yourſelves, did not the Church fulminate its cenſures againſt thoſe who, at the ſolemnity of Eaſter, refuſe to partake of this heavenly food. Or, if you communicate at ſtated times of the year, when it is the practice of thoſe with whom you live or aſſociate to approach to the Altar, perhaps you do it rather as a thing of cuſtom, a matter of ceremony, a diſagreeable buſineſs, a painful ſervitude from which you wiſh to be diſengaged; and then return with new avidity to the accuſtomed round of vanity and folly which fills up your days; to thoſe dangerous, and perhaps even criminal,

pleaſures,

pleaſures, which you were grieved to abſtain from, even for the moment.

Ah! Chriſtian hearts, formed for goodneſs, and for an union with the God of love, deal honourably, liberally, and generouſly with your God; ſhow him that grateful mind which you pretend to admire and eſteem on every other occaſion; and then you will taſte how ſweet he is. Enlarge the veſſel of your heart, by diſcharging from it every profane affection, and he will not leave it empty. No: he will fill it, he will make it overflow with his graces and conſolations. Then you will truly put on Jeſus Chriſt: his precious blood, flowing through your veins, will give you his inclinations, his ſentiments, his features; will form you to an entire reſemblance with him: like princes deſcended from a royal race, there will appear in your countenances, and whole deportment, an air of majeſty which ſpeaks the nobleneſs of your origin: your words, your deſires, your actions, all will be heavenly, and worthy

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the blood which you inherit; and you will be able to ſay with St. Paul, *I live now, not I, but Chriſt liveth in me.*

II. A ſecond fruit of this adorable Sacrament is, that, by receiving it, we make a memorial of all the wonders which Jeſus hath worked in our favour. By his preſence upon our altars, he awakens in our minds the dear remembrace of thoſe ſacred actions, thoſe conſoling words, that inſtructive converſation of his mortal life, which is capable of making ſo ſtrong and ſalutary an impreſſion on a loving heart: *Do this*, ſaid our Redeemer, when he inſtituted this myſtery, *do this in remembrance of me.* So inconſtant is the human heart, that abſence frequently looſens the bands of the moſt intimate friendſhip. Our Lord foreſaw, that when he ſhould have aſcended to Heaven, his diſciples would inſenſibly forget his benefits and his inſtructions. Alas! Moſes had been but forty days on the mountain, and the Iſraelites remembered no more the prodigies

digies he had performed for their deliverance from the ſlavery of Egypt. "What is become of him?" they cried out: "Let us make Gods for ourſelves." That we might not be thus unhappily loſt to every grateful recollection, forgetful of all which the memory of man ſhould hold moſt dear; Jeſus, before he aſcended to the heavenly Sion, to the right hand of his eternal father, left us a pledge of his preſence, that we may conſole ourſelves in our baniſhment, till we are admitted to behold him face to face, and that we may never eraſe from our minds the image of his divine and adorable perſon.

You envy the fortunate condition of his Diſciples, who, on earth, converſed familiarly with him: you could have wiſhed to have been in the place of the woman that touched the hem of his garment, of the ſinner that bedewed his feet with her tears, of the multitude who caught the words of grace which flowed from his lips. The Patriarchs and Prophets

phets longed to ſee his day. Come then to our altars: there you ſhall ſee him; you ſhall touch him; you ſhall embrace him; you ſhall give him a kiſs of peace; you may bedew his feet with your tears; you may carry him in your breaſt, and be incorporated with him.

In former ages, the piety of your forefathers carried them to Paleſtine, to viſit the places conſecrated by his preſence, and adore his footſteps. Walking and converſing together over that hallowed ground: "In this ſpot," ſaid they, "he came into the world: here he expired on the croſs for our redemption: ſitting near this well he converſed with the Samaritan woman." The view of the ſcenes in which he had ſpent his mortal life; of the mountains on which he delivered his heavenly doctrines, or retired to converſe with his eternal Father in the ſilence of the night, cauſed a new joy to ſpring up in their minds. They ſhed tears flowing from a tenderneſs which religion inſpired. Then a freſh

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ardour was enkindled in their ſouls. Their faith became more active: their hopes were heightened; they were all on fire with divine love. Oh! Chriſtians, it is not neceſſary you ſhould paſs the ſeas, in order to be inſpired with theſe devout and virtuous ſentiments. Your ſalvation is near at hand. Look with the eye of faith. What do you behold upon our altars, when we offer up the tremendous ſacrifice? Not only places conſecrated by his preſence; but himſelf, on whom the Angels delight to fix their enraptured ſight.

Come then, and renew your remembrance of him. Let his preſence on our altars awaken in your minds all thoſe pious emotions which the circumſtances of his life and death have ever excited in your hearts. Let the memory of that meekneſs and gentleneſs which he diſplayed in his converſation among men, calm all your anger and impatience, quell the riſings of paſſion, and diffuſe tranquillity through your ſouls.

ſouls. Let the memory of his labour and toil for your ſalvation, make you aſhamed of your own indolence in proſecuting that important buſineſs in which all your intereſts are centered. Come, and remember his humility, and repreſs the ſwellings of pride; bluſh at your vanity, and put a ſtop to your ambitious projects. Let the remembrance of that zeal with which he caſt out thoſe who profaned the temple of God, teach you with that reverential awe you ſhould come to adore him in his Sanctuary. Let the amiable ſimplicity of his manners convince you how truly ridiculous are the vain affectations of ours. Remembering the ſolitary hours which he ſpent in communing with his heavenly Father, let us learn to court retirement; to ſhun, as much as we can be allowed to do it, the buſtle and tumult of life; to make ourſelves a ſolitude in our own chambers, where we may pour forth our hearts before the God that made us and all things.

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In a word, let the dear memory of all the virtues which he exhibited in his divine perſon, renewed and impreſſed deeply on our minds by his preſence in this myſtery, correct all our defects, and carry us on from one degree of perfection to another, till we become like unto him. Thus we ſhall indeed communicate in remembrance of him: and this remembrance will give us that purity and dignity of conduct, which is ſuited to our divine hopes. Undefiled by the pleaſures of the world, and unſhaken by its terrors, we ſhall preſerve one conſtant tenor of goodneſs; ever looking forward, and conſoling ourſelves with the expectation of that brighter day, which will ſhortly begin to dawn; when Jeſus will throw off theſe mean appearances which now conceal his glories, and diſcloſe himſelf to our ſouls in all his ſplendour and beauty; when the Sun of righteouſneſs ſhall riſe before us, and all that is imperfect ſhall be done away for ever.

SERMON XXXIV.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

The Parable of the Loſt Sheep.

There ſhall be joy in Heaven upon one ſinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine juſt, who need not penance. Luke xv. 7.

WE find by many inſtances in our Redeemer's mortal life, that, agreeably to his own declaration, *I am not come to call the juſt, but ſinners*, (Mat. ix.) he often treated ſinners mildly, tenderly, and even with familiarity. He admitted them to his company; he ſometimes would ſit down and eat and drink at their table. This affability, this amiable

able condeſcenſion of Jeſus, drew upon him the reproaches of the ſupercilious Phariſees, who, proud of their own apparent virtues, affected to keep themſelves ſternly at a diſtance from men of vicious or even ſuſpected characters, and conſtantly expreſſed for them the utmoſt abhorrence and contempt. In the Goſpel of this day, we read that *the Phariſees and the Scribes murmured, ſaying, This man receiveth ſinners, and eateth with them.* He anſwered their murmurings by propoſing to them a parable, a mode of conveying inſtruction, which, in the ſtyle of thoſe eaſtern countries in that age, was univerſally adopted. Making uſe of a familiar, but beautiful image, he corrects the ſeverity and aſperity of their falſe virtues, by ſhowing them, that the ſovereign Lord of Heaven and Earth, although himſelf the ſource of purity, yet neither hated nor deſpiſed thoſe who were the work of his hands, although by ſin they had made themſelves his enemies; that he did not

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inſtantly abandon them; that, on the contrary, he ſtill loved his creature, though armed in rebellion againſt him; and conſequently, waited for his return to a ſenſe of his duty; and not only waited for him, but ſought him in his wanderings, endeavoured to bring him back to the paths of virtue and peace, and celebrated his return with every teſtimony of joy.

The ſimilitude he makes uſe of is this: he compares the ſolicitude of God for the ſalvation of ſinners, to the conduct of a ſhepherd who has diſcovered that one of his ſheep has ſtrayed from the fold. *What man is there of you*, ſays he, *that hath an hundred ſheep, and if he ſhall looſe one of them, doth he not leave the ninety nine in the deſert, and go after that which was loſt, until he find it? And when he hath found it, doth he not lay it on his ſhoulders, rejoicing; and, coming home, call together his friends and neighbours, ſaying to them, Rejoice with me, becauſe I have found my ſheep that*

was loſt? I ſay to you, that even ſo there ſhall be joy in Heaven upon one ſinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety nine juſt, who need not penance. In this image, my brethren, you have delineated before you, a juſt repreſentation of the goodneſs and mercy with which the Almighty treats his ſinful creatures. The divine Shepherd of our ſouls, leaving the ninety nine juſt in the green paſtures where he has placed them, is eſpecially ſolicitous to recover the ſheep that has ſtrayed away. He follows it with his eye when it begins to wander from him. He goes after it into the bye-ways of error and illuſion, among the rocks and precipices, the dangerous and ruinous temptations, in the midſt of which it is thoughtleſsly and fooliſhly ſporting on the very brink of deſtruction. He comes up with it, calls it to him.—Alas! though it ſee its folly, it is ſo worn out with the fatiguing purſuit of iniquity, that of itſelf it is utterly unable to return. With an unſpeaka-

ble love therefore he takes it upon his ſhoulders, that is, ſupports it by his powerful grace, and carries it back to the fold, to the fruitful and rich paſtures of peace and juſtice.

Conformably to the deſign of the Church, in calling our attention on this Sunday to the conſideration of the conſoling truths conveyed in the above-mentioned parable, and that I may give encouragement to ſuch ſinners as wiſh to return to their God, but are diſheartened at the view of their paſt crimes and enormities, I will endeavour, in the firſt place, to give you a juſt idea of the goodneſs of God, in waiting for the converſion of ſinners, and ſeeking to bring them back to himſelf. Secondly, I will ſpeak of the effects which our knowledge of the divine mercy ſhould produce in our conduct.

I. Notwithſtanding there neither is, nor can be, any real diſtinction between the perfections and attributes of the Deity; ſince all that is in God is God

himſelf, and conſequently is ſimple and indiviſible as is the divine nature; yet we may obſerve, that the attributes of God are not always equally manifeſted to us in this mortal life. On ſome occaſions, his majeſty, glory, and magnificence, are made particularly conſpicuous, ſo as to ſtrike us with aſtoniſhment and reverential awe. Sometimes his juſtice is exerted, and the terrible effects of his vengeance fall on his enemies. At other times, the rays of his goodneſs ſhine forth, and cheer the hearts of his weak and deſponding creatures. The majeſty of the Supreme Being, which here is but faintly and imperfectly diſcloſed to our feeble ſight, from the conſideration of thoſe parts of the viſible creation which ſhow forth his glory; is diſplayed in Heaven, in his eternal kingdom, with all its luſtre. His juſtice and his mercy are eminently conſpicuous whitherſoever we turn our eyes, in heaven and on earth. But there is one perfection of God which

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only appears upon earth; and that is, his patience: for, beyond the limits of this life, as there is no room for merit or demerit, for ſinning, or being converted from ſin, ſo there can be no object about which the patience and forbearance of the Almighty can properly be exerciſed.

But here on earth, my brethren, in the government of his creatures, he ſeems to delight in ſhowing forth a patience and forbearance beyond all conception. He gives the ſinner continual proofs of it every moment that he ſuffers him to live after the firſt violation of his law. The inſtant a creature preſumes to deſpiſe the commands of the Moſt High, to ſlight his juſtice, and abuſe his mercy; the moment he dares to lift up his hand againſt his Creator; that moment he forfeits all title to the divine protection, and could, without any infringement of ſtricteſt juſtice, be plunged into eternal perdition. The Almighty owes us nothing: he created

us out of pure and diſintereſted love, that he might communicate to us a ſhare of his felicity: and if we are loſt, it is by the act of our own free will; our perdition is from ourſelves.

You will be ſtill more clearly convinced of the exceſs of God's patience in bearing with ſinners, if I may uſe ſuch an expreſſion, by reflecting, that all his creatures, and all his other perfections, demand with one voice the immediate deſtruction of a ſinner. As long as man continued faithful to his God, and obedient to his laws, all viſible creatures were obedient to man, and miniſtered to his comforts and pleaſures. The earth, without the toil and drudgery of tillage, yielded ſpontaneous fruits. Then each revolving ſeaſon brought with it a new variety of joys. No jarring elements could introduce diſeaſe into his frame, or torture his body with pain. Each morning's dawn awakened him to a day which would glide ſmoothly along, unvexed by anxi-

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ous cares; and the departing ſun invited him to a calm and undiſturbed repoſe. Dear to his Creator as the apple of his eye, and ſheltered under the ſhadow of his wings, his heart glowed with conſtant gratitude and love, and exulted in the expectation of being at length removed from that ſcene of earthly bliſs, only to be put in poſſeſſion of delights ſtill more exquiſite, of pleaſures permanent and immortal.

But, no ſooner, did he rebel againſt his Maker, than the paradiſe of ſweets was changed into a dreary waſte, a wilderneſs of troubles, a vale of ſorrows. The paths of life became ſtrewed over with ſharp and painful thorns. He was condemned to eat his bread in the ſweat of his brow. A train of miſeries enſued, diſeaſe, want, pain, and grief: a ſeed of death was incorporated in him, preying inceſſantly on his vital parts, and carrying him on with rapid progreſs to the grave, where he ſhould mingle with the duſt of which he was

originally formed; while his departing ſpirit could expect no better doom, than to be baniſhed far from its ſovereign good, and, if contaminated with actual guilt, to be confined in thoſe regions of darkneſs and woe, where no order, but everlaſting horror, dwells.

That he was allowed to breathe one inſtant after his tranſgreſſion, can only be aſcribed to God's merciful forbearance: for all the other perfections of the Deity ſeem to demand, that the ſinner ſhould inſtantly undergo the puniſhment of his crime. The infinite ſanctity and unſpotted purity of God, muſt engage him to withdraw himſelf from a ſoul defiled with guilt. His juſtice exacts a ſevere retribution: his immenſity demands, that in every place, the ſinner ſhould reap the bitter fruits of iniquity, and that he ſhould ſuffer in every ſtage of his being, and for ever. Infinite power and wiſdom furniſh the ready means of inflicting the puniſhment: only mercy pleads his cauſe;

cauſe; mercy holds back the avenging arm uplifted to ſtrike; mercy obtains for him a farther reſpite, and waits, till, wearied out with his vain purſuits, and taught by ſad experience how empty and unſatisfactory are the joys he was in ſearch of, he return again, pierced with compunction, overwhelmed with confuſion, and throw himſelf into the arms of that goodneſs which he had ſo ungratefully abandoned and abuſed.

Yet more, my brethren: the goodneſs of God is not only exerted in waiting for the ſinner's converſion; but, as you ſee in the parable of this day's Goſpel, he goes himſelf in purſuit of him. Alas! if the Almighty only waited for the ſinner, he would never return: he has loſt that grace, without which he cannot advance one ſtep towards his true home. The Lord therefore ſeeks him out; tenderly calls him back; entreats him to come, and be once more truly happy; runs after him with unſpeakable love, and con-

ducts him to the fold. *God*, says the Apostle, *who is rich in mercy, for his exceeding great charity wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead by sins, hath quickened us together in Christ, by whose grace you are saved, and hath raised us up together, and hath made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus; that he might show, in the ages to come, the abundant riches of his grace.* Oh! my friends, reflect with grateful minds on this incomprehensible goodness. The Lord, when by sin we declare ourselves his enemies, still holds our interests near and dear to his heart. Even when we are armed in rebellion against him, when our hands are yet reeking with the blood of his Son, whom we crucify by our enormities, he stretches out his arms to embrace us. That a person who has received an injury should do a kindness to his adversary, when the injury has been repented of, is not strange. Hardly is any rage so violent, but a proper submission, and

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the courſe of time, will calm its emotions. But that a man, the very moment when you are piercing his boſom, gives you marks of Love! that you never ſee, only God is capable of ſo exalted a charity. When the criminal; by his enormities, pierces the breaſt of Jeſus, and ſeeks to tear open his heart by baſe and cruel ingratitude; Jeſus opens it ſtill more to him by every teſtimony of the fondeſt affection. When it might well be expected that heaven's reddeſt vengeance would light on the impious aſſaſſin, mercy converts the lightning of God's indignation into a mild and beneficent ray of clemency, which, inſtead of conſuming, enlightens, cheers, and comforts. Mercy touches his ſoul, and bids thoſe penitential tears to ſtream from his eyes, which waſh away the ſtains and defilements of his guilt.

You, my brethren, as many of you as have ever unfortunately ſinned; you, if you unfold the ſecrets of your hearts, and confeſs the truth, will own that this mer-

cy, this darling attribute of heaven, has been many times particularly exerted in your favour. Whenever you were about to commit a ſin, you heard Jeſus ſpeaking in your interior by the voice of your conſcience, and perſuading you not to proceed to the commiſſion of that crime; not to indulge that luſtful deſire; not to gratify that ſenſual appetite; not to conſent to that injuſtice; not to utter thoſe oaths and imprecations. This remorſe of conſcience, what is it but the voice of divine grace? By mingling bitterneſs with your unlawful pleaſures, he invited you to ſeek, in his friendſhip, for ſweets unalloyed with ſorrows. Often, by the miniſtry of the Paſtors of his Church, he hath taught you heavenly wiſdom, and ſet before you the charms of virtue; and, this day, it was he that ſent me to lay before you his mercies, that you might be gained to his love. Why is your God ſo ſolicitous to make you virtuous? Are you neceſſary to him? Is he unhappy unleſs you are ſaved? Will his glory be diminiſhed?

miniſhed? Will his peace be diſturbed by your ruin? By no means. That the ſhepherd ſhould go in ſearch of the ſtrayed ſheep, is not very wonderful; the loſs of it would have been a diminution of his ſubſtance: or, that the woman mentioned in the Goſpel, who loſt a piece of money, which was to provide for her ſuſtenance, ſhould ſeek it diligently, and rejoice to find it, is what we might naturally ſuppoſe. But that the eternal God, who needs not the ſervices of his creatures, who, if this whole creation were annihilated, could call forth, out of nothing, thouſands and millions of ſouls, who would bleſs him throughout endleſs ages; that he ſhould ſeek after his guilty creatures, and intereſt himſelf in their happineſs, is a prodigy of love, which no figures or ſimilitudes, drawn from created objects, can ever deſcribe, or powers of language ſufficiently expreſs.

II. This knowledge we have of the mercies of God, the aſſurances he gives

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us that he is ſlow to anger; and that he thirſts after our happineſs, are the foundation of a Chriſtian hope, and the conſolation of the penitent ſoul. Let us therefore now conſider, what influence it ſhould have upon our conduct. Shall the ſinner conclude from it, that he may yet venture to live on in his iniquity? Great God! what baſeneſs, what deſperate raſhneſs would be included in ſuch a determination! An ingratitude this, ſurely of the moſt execrable kind. That there ſhould ever have been a man capable of it, reflects diſgrace on human nature. It is as if he ſaid, Becauſe God is good and merciful to me, becauſe he heaps on me his favours when I leaſt deſerve them; therefore I will continue to inſult him, to abuſe his favours, and employ them againſt himſelf. Vile wretch! ſhall this love of Jeſus which calls for the moſt generous return, find you inſenſible? Nay, ſhall it be the motive of your continuing to declare your enmity againſt him, to repeat your outrages! I

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have not words to deſcribe ſo deteſtable a character. *Thinkeſt thou,* ſays St. Paul, *thinkeſt thou this, O man,* that doſt theſe things, *that thou ſhalt eſcape the judgement of God? Or deſpiſeſt thou the riches of his goodneſs, and patience, and long-ſuffering? Knoweſt thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance? But according to thy hardneſs and impenitent heart, thou treaſureſt up to thyſelf wrath, againſt the day of wrath and revelation of the juſt judgement of God, who will render to every man according to his works.* (Rom. ii.)

Yes, ſinner, the Almighty at length will no longer ſolicit or await your converſion. Mercy abuſed will give place to inexorable juſtice; and, when you leaſt expect it, the indignation of Heaven will come burſting on you like a torrent: *Tribulation and anguiſh upon every ſoul of man that worketh evil.* (Rom. ii.) Heaven forbid, the experience of any one here ſhould give him a conviction of this truth! It would be a dear-bought experience indeed. Oh! truſt not your

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ſoul to that dreadful hazard. Reaſon with yourſelves in this manner: "Where would now have been my dwelling, if, for the firſt crime which I committed, I had been treated as I deſerved to be treated? if for the firſt injuſtice I conſented to, the firſt rancour I nouriſhed in my breaſt, the firſt impure paſſion I indulged, the Almighty had abandoned me to the effects of his wrath? Ah! thouſands are now deploring their miſery in the bottomleſs abyſs, with tears which will flow in vain for eternity; thouſands who had committed fewer crimes than thoſe with which I ſtand charged. One, the moment he had by luſt defiled the temple of the Holy Ghoſt, was, by the conſequences of that very crime, carried to the grave: another, in a ſtate of intoxication, has, either by caſualty, or the malice of an enemy, been hurried before the judgement-ſeat of God. In the hands of God are life and death, and he diſpenſes them according to his pleaſure. But to me how mercifully hath he ſhown him-

himſelf! It is now ten, twenty, or more years ſince I began to ſin, and he hath ſtill ſpared me: even now he gives me leiſure to repent, and urges me to repentance. O Lord, thy loving kindneſs hath triumphed over my heart:—from this moment it is thine: and that it may be acceptable to thee, I will never ceaſe to water it with the tears of compunction; I will daily lay it at the foot of the croſs, to be purified in the blood of the Lamb."

This is the wiſe and prudent uſe which the ſinner ſhould make of the knowledge he has of the mercies of his God. And you, who now are united to your Lord, you, who, although you may have ſtrayed from him, have by ſincere repentance returned to him again, let the conſideration of his mercies melt your hearts with tenderneſs: let his love meet in you with a conſtant return of fidelity and love. Learn to ſet a due value on the advantages of your preſent condition. How ſweet is the ſucceeding calm and the

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proſperous gale, to the fatigued, and almoſt exhauſted mariner, who has long been toſſed about by adverſe winds on a tumultuous ocean, amidſt ſtorms and furious tempeſts! How exquiſite the enjoyment of returning health, to one who has been long the victim of a cruel diſeaſe, and confined to the bed of ſorrow and pain! So ſweet are the ſenſations, ſo exquiſite the enjoyments of that ſoul, which, after many wanderings amidſt the objects of its deſtructive paſſions, after all the bitterneſs and miſery of guilt, now repoſes, in peace and pure delight, on the boſom of its Lord, its generous benefactor, its tender parent; ſecure in his friendſhip, ſupported by his grace, and happy in his love. Baniſh all dejecting and deſponding thoughts. Though you are beſet by many dangers, ſurrounded by many ſnares; though your frailty gives you daily reaſon to apprehend the loſs of his grace; cling cloſe to him with a loving confidence. He will finiſh the good work he hath begun. In the hour

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of trial and temptation, call upon him, and he will hear your cry. Surely the good Shepherd, who fought with ſuch anxious care the ſheep that wandered from the fold, will never ſuffer thoſe to periſh who deſire to follow his guidance, to feed in his paſtures, to live under his protection, and be obedient to his will. No, my friends, it will not, cannot be. *This*, ſaid Jeſus, *is the will of the Father who ſent me; that of all that he hath given me, I ſhould loſe nothing, but ſhould raiſe it up again in the laſt day.* (John vi. 39.)

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SERMON XXXV.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

On the Advantages of Retirement.

It came to paſs, that when the multitude preſſed on Jeſus....going up into one of the ſhips that was Simon's, he deſired him to thruſt out a little from the land. Luke v. 1.

FROM the circumſtances here mentioned of our Saviour's ſeeking to avoid the preſſure of the multitude, I ſhall take occaſion this day to make ſome reflexions on the utility of frequent retirement. Perhaps, with the letter of my text, the ſubject may not appear very cloſely connected: but, as every incident of our Redeemer's mortal life, and each circumſtance

cumſtance of his conduct when he converſed among men, was fraught with ſome uſeful inſtruction; and as he could undoubtedly have exerted his divine power ſo as to feel no uneaſineſs nor inconvenience from the crowd which preſſed upon him; the piety of many moral interpreters of the ſacred Writings, has induced them to infer, that his principal deſign in this proceeding, was to admoniſh his Diſciples to withdraw occaſionally from the multitude, to retire from the tumult and buſtle of human affairs, that they might, with more facility, impreſs on their minds the truths of eternal life, and nouriſh in their ſouls that ſpirit of piety, which an uninterrupted communication with the world is ſo apt to extinguiſh.

The advantages of retirement are a ſubject to which I much wiſh to engage your attention; for to me it appears, that of all the means which conduce to the happineſs either of this or of a future life, none is more effectual than a love

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of retirement, a fondneſs for ſolitude and recollection. Indeed, my beloved friends, while we dwell among the multitude, we can liſten to the calls of worldly intereſt, to the clamours of paſſion, and to the invitations of ſenſual pleaſure: but the language of reaſon, and the dictates of Religion, are there little attended to, ſeldom heard; and, if they even reach our ear, make an impreſſion ſo feeble as to be quickly forgotten amidſt the louder and more flattering language of the world, and of the paſſions. In ſolitude we can liſten to the admonitions of conſcience, to the voice of God, to the inſpirations of Jeſus: without retirement we never ſhall.

Firſt, therefore, let us take a view of its utility in the attaining and ſecuring of preſent happineſs; and then proceed to conſider it as intimately and inſeparably connected with our eternal intereſts.

I. When I ſpeak of the advantages of retirement, it will, no doubt, readily occur to you, that it is not my intention

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to inculcate the neceſſity of an entire retreat from worldly affairs. Religion does not require that; nor does ſhe enjoin a very great retreat from them. Few ſtations in life will admit of it, and there are fewer ſtill which render it neceſſary. The general vocation of Chriſtians is to an active life, and it is in the various ſcenes of ſuch a life that they are bound to approve themſelves to heaven. The greater part of the world, and, I believe I may venture to ſay, all my preſent hearers are to honour and glorify their Creator by cauſing their light to ſhine before men, in the good works which they perform amidſt their fellow-creatures. The Supreme Ruler of the univerſe hath allotted to each of us a certain ſphere of duties and employments, in which we are bound to exert our reſpective abilities; and to neglect theſe duties, with a view to repoſe in ſolitude, would, in many caſes, be highly criminal.

But

But although an entire retreat from the world would diſqualify us for acting the part for which Providence intended us, it is equally certain that, without the aid of occaſional retirement, we ſhall act that part but very imperfectly; and, at the ſame time, buſtle through life without much real profit, and with a ſmall ſhare of true comfort.

If there be in this world any thing like true happineſs; I mean in this world, as conſidered abſtractedly from any reference to our future exiſtence; it muſt reſult from the regular, faithful, and ſucceſsful diſcharge of our earthly obligations; and from an innocent enjoyment of thoſe comforts, which our bountiful Creator hath provided for our refreſhment in the paſſage through life. This is all that earthly happineſs can ever amount to: but this happineſs, without occaſional retirement, you will never enjoy.

As to your earthly obligations, it is evident, that, without ſetting apart ſome time

time for ſerious reflection, you can never diſcharge any duty with propriety. It is always, at beſt, very uncertain, whether any thing will be well done, which is not firſt planned and determined on by cool and diſpaſſionate reaſon. In the preſſing moment of action and urgency of buſineſs, paſſion is found to throw ſuch a falſe colouring on every object around us, that then we can have little hope of viewing any thing in a juſt light. The man, therefore, who wiſhes to go through any buſineſs well, muſt, from time to time, withdraw into the cool and ſilent ſhade. There, with a ſober and ſteady eye, he may diſcern what is wiſe and what is fooliſh in human conduct: there he may unravel the intricacies of his affairs; inveſtigate each circumſtance of his obligations, each tendency to his intereſts: there he may concert his meaſures, and then come forth into the ſcene of action again, guided by the light which he has acquired, fortified by the determinations which he has formed,

calm, collected, and maſter of himſelf, and prepared to encounter whatever may befall.

As he who never mingles hours of retirement, hours dedicated to thoughtfulneſs, with his worldly occupations, can never ſuſtain any character with propriety, ſo neither can he taſte any of the enjoyments of life with a proper reliſh. Meats are then the moſt ſavoury, when the appetite is ſharpened by abſtinence or exerciſe; and, from the ſame principle, amuſements and pleaſures are then only exquiſitely delightful, when the mind, after having employed its faculties about ſome ſerious buſineſs, or in ſome intenſe application, is eager to unbend itſelf, and relieve its wearineſs. When the whole purſuit of life is to add one amuſement to another, to flirt from one gay circle to another, in a ſhort time nothing remains, but to tread the ſame beaten round; to enjoy what has been already enjoyed; to ee again what has been often ſeen; and pleaſures thus drawn to the very dregs,

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if I may be indulged the expreſſion, are taſteleſs or nauſeous, and, conſequently, are pleaſures no longer. Ah! how many in the higher ranks of life, who have riches in abundance to miniſter to their pleaſures, after having tried every artifice of luxury, repeatedly revelled in each ſcene of gaiety and feſtivity, and glittered in every public aſſembly, have at length been forced into a melancholy retreat! Happy, if they had been led into retirement by reaſon and Religion. But no: they are driven to it by diſappointed hopes, a diſtempered conſtitution, and exhauſted ſpirits; weeping over this diſtreſſing truth, which they are at length conſtrained to acknowledge, That all was vanity and affliction of ſpirit.

Moreover, my beloved, the love of pleaſure glows with ſuch exceſſive ardour in the breaſts of mankind, that it requires much cool deliberation, much cautious attention, to check its vivacity, and reſtrain it from hurrying us beyond thoſe fatal limits, which if we once paſs inno-

cence, and with innocence peace and comfort are certainly loſt. Pleaſure, from being at firſt the amuſement, may eaſily become the buſineſs, and then will infallibly prove the burden of life. Great God! who can deſcribe the miſchiefs created among that claſs of men in particular, whoſe ſubſiſtence, reputation, and enjoyments, muſt be drawn from their own induſtry and attention to buſineſs; who can deſcribe the miſeries entailed upon ſuch men, by an intemperate fondneſs for pleaſure, unreſtrained by ſerious thought! Alas! my friends, I need not attempt it. The bankruptcies that crowd our gazettes, the gaming tables, the tribes of daring robbers that infeſt our roads, the victims of proſtitution that each night fill our ſtreets, the priſons, the gibbet, are ſo many melancholy witneſſes of the havock and ruin which it produces. Oh! Pleaſure, theſe are thy trophies! theſe the fruits of diſſipation! Inſomuch, my brethren, that, were I to forget the great end of my miniſtry;

niſtry; were I to ſpeak only the language of a worldling, and ſolely regard your earthly intereſts and ſatisfactions, I could point out to you no better means for ſecuring both the one and the other, than frequent retirement filled up with ſerious thought.

But it is my duty to attend to higher intereſts than theſe; and therefore, having ſaid thus much to convince you that retirement is evidently conducive to the happineſs of this life, I ſhall ſhow you that it is abſolutely neceſſary to prepare us for the life to come.

II. The grand buſineſs of the man who wiſhes to regulate his actions by the precepts of Religion, is to impreſs upon his mind ſo ſtrong a ſenſe of the importance of obedience to the Divine Will, and ſo clear a conviction of the wiſdom and beauty of Holineſs, as may overbear every temptation which temporal hope or fear can oppoſe to his virtue, and enable him to bid equal defiance to joy and to ſorrow; to purſue a ſteady courſe of

integrity and ſincere piety, unſeduced by the allurements of worldly intereſt or ambition; and to puſh reſolutely forward againſt all the menaces of earthly calamity.

But will conſtant intercourſe with the world contribute any thing to the nouriſhment of this temper and diſpoſition of mind? No: almoſt every thing we there hear and behold tends to weaken and deſtroy it. Our converſation with men is generally, in many reſpects, an education for vice. From our infant years we are accuſtomed to hear riches and honours extolled as the chief poſſeſſions of man, and propoſed to us as the principal aim of our future purſuits. We are trained up to look with admiration on the flattering marks of diſtinction which they beſtow. Which ever way we turn our eyes, we ſee the multitude eagerly preſſing on in purſuit of the ſame fancied bleſſings. We ſometimes hear men talk of principles of duty, of honour, probity, and other moral excellencies;

cies; but it is not often that we ſee theſe principles ſtedfaſtly adhered to in oppoſition to worldly profit. In common converſation, every vice is diveſted of its real character, and preſented to us under ſome ſoft name, or artful colouring. Diſſimulation is named prudent precaution; fraud, an attention to the main chance. Revenge, and even murder, are termed an affair of honour. To ſcoff at Religion, and at every thing ſacred, paſſes with the world for wit and humour. Writings which chiefly aim at extirpating every ſeed of piety, are cried up as works ennobled by liberality of ſentiment, and philoſophic freedom of thought. You well know that this is the ſtyle of the times, and that, by liſtening to ſuch language, even our natural ſenſe of the diſtinction between good and evil is by degrees conſiderably weakened. Add to this, that we often ſee crimes authoriſed by the higheſt examples, and rewarded by the careſſes and ſmiles of the world. Nay, we ſometimes diſco-

ver that ſome of thoſe whom we have been taught to eſteem and reverence, of thoſe who ſhould be our guides in the path of virtue, and the models of our conduct, act upon principles no purer than thoſe of other men.

Thus breathing, habitually, a contagious air, our ruin is inevitable, unleſs we ſometimes retreat from this peſtilential region, and ſeek for a proper remedy for the diſorders contracted there, and for an antidote againſt them in future. Religious retirement both abates the diſeaſe, by withdrawing us from the corrupting influence of the world; and furniſhes the remedy and the antidote, by giving an opportunity for better principles to exert their power. By accuſtoming ourſelves frequently to turn aſide, and attend to the maxims which Jeſus hath laid down for the rule of our conduct, we give leiſure for thoſe maxims to make a laſting impreſſion upon our minds. By a ſerious meditation on the grand objects which religion holds up to

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our view, and on the virtues which it enjoins, we hear truths, which the multitude will never be generous enough to tell us, and acquire a knowledge which the world cannot impart; the knowledge of God and of ourſelves, that maſter ſcience which makes men wiſe to eternity. The voice of God, ſpeaking to the interior in ſolitude, will ſhed a light on the mind, which will diſſolve the charms of worldly vanity, and awaken feelings in the heart, which a converſation with creatures only overpowers and ſuppreſs ſes. In retirement you make the truthe of heaven familiar to your minds; ſo familiar, that they will be ever before your eyes: and by their guidance, you will ſo walk through temporal things, as never to loſe ſight of thoſe which are eternal; while the corrupt maxims of the world, when you are neceſſitated to hear them, will but paſs through your imaginations as objects of deteſtation and terror.

The exerciſes of devotion, which ar- the principal occupation of a Chriſtian

life, neceſſarily ſuppoſe ſome retirement from the world: and this was one reaſon why our Redeemer would not beſtow upon us his graces, but by the channel of prayer; that we might be occaſionally ſequeſtered from the great ſcene of vice and folly, the continual preſence of which is ſo hurtful to our ſouls. It is in ſolitude that Religion exerts all her powers: ſolitude is the hallowed ground which ſhe has choſen for her own. In ſolitude the tears of contrition flow, and waſh away the ſtains of paſt guilt. There the ſoul melts with all the tenderneſs of devotion, and pours itſelf forth before him that made it, and him who redeemed it. There Jeſus effectually ſpeaks to the heart, and the heart hears his voice. *I will allure her*, ſaith the Spirit of God, *and will lead her into the wilderneſs; and I will ſpeak to her heart.* (Oſ. ii.) In ſolitude is enkindled the fire of divine love. *In my meditation*, ſays holy David, *a fire ſhall flame out;* (Pſ. xxxviii.) while the flames of every profane affection grow dull,

dull, lifeleſs, and are extinguiſhed. Oh! ſolitude, thou deſtroyer of every vice! thou purifier of all that is defiled! when wounded in the conteſt with our enemies, we run to thee, and receive a cure from thy healing hand. Thou art a refuge when the world purſues us; a ſhade under which we retire to avoid its burning heat.

But it will be to little purpoſe to be convinced that you can reap many advantages from retirement, unleſs you determine to reap them for yourſelves, and make them your own. It is not by knowing the means of ſalvation that you will be ſaved; but by employing them with ſteady perſeverance. Here you will perhaps wiſh to propoſe a difficulty, and to ſay: "How can I have frequent recourſe to ſolitude and meditation? I have no leiſure: my time is more than taken up with the buſineſs of life, with the duties of my ſtation; and thoſe, you allow, muſt not be neglected." I anſwer, that, provided you wiſh for retirement,

provided you be not afraid of being alone, opportunities for it will not be wanted. I ſay: if you be not afraid of being alone; for, in truth, the grand reaſon why men are averſe from ſolitude is this: they cannot bear their own thoughts: they are afraid to view their own hearts; they wiſh to keep in continual diſſipation and buſtle, that they may remain deaf to the voice of conſcience, reaſon, and religion; becauſe they know that theſe would tell them truths which are painful; truths which they cannot bear to hear. If you find in yourſelves this reluctance, no wonder you have ſo many excuſes for flying from retirement. But, my friends, this fear of retirement is a plain proof, that all is not right within; and, conſequently, that you have greater need of retirement. Bring yourſelves once to the reſolution of ſeeking for truth, however oppoſite it may be to your criminal deſires, your ſenſual appetites, and your unjuſt intereſts: be determined to know the ſtate

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of your ſouls, to probe the wounds of conſcience, to view your own hearts naked as they are, at this moment, in the ſight of God, and without any of the diſguiſes of ſelf-love: come to this determination, and depend upon it you will find time for retirement. What, my friends, out of the many half hours which are fooliſhly ſquandered away, even by the perſon the moſt ſtraightened in circumſtances of all this aſſembly—out of the many half hours which are ſacrificed to indolence, to amuſement, to unprofitable converſation, cannot one be occaſionally devoted to a communication with God and the bleſſed Angels? You would bluſh to anſwer in the negative. Have the intereſts of your immortal ſouls at heart, and then retirement will be your delight; then, inſtead of alledging flimſy pretences for avoiding ſolitude, even in the midſt of your diſtracting occupations, you will look forward, with pleaſure and with longing, towards the moment when you ſhall be again at

liberty to indulge recollection and ſerious thought.

The great and the good have been in every age diſtinguiſhed by their fondneſs for retirement. All the illuſtrious characters of the Old and New Teſtament were remarkable for frequent ſolitary muſings. The patriarch Iſaac went out in the evening to meditate in the fields. David, amidſt the ſplendours of royalty, often ſpeaks with rapture of the pleaſure he taſted in devout meditation; and our bleſſed Lord himſelf, who needed not the aids to be derived from retirement, entered frequently into it, to give us a profitable example. Often were the garden, the mountain, and the ſilence of the night, alone conſcious to his heavenly communications with his eternal Father. Often, when he had diſmiſſed the multitude, he went up to the mountain to pray.

Come, my brethren, while you are toſſed about in the tumults and agitations of the world, your hours glide rapidly

pidly on; and unleſs you be wiſe enough to ſecure ſome hours for reflection, the cloſe of life will overtake you, before you have yet determined how to live. One day, ſome pious ſentiments are awakened in your hearts, and you form good reſolutions: the next day, you plunge into the world again, and forget that any impreſſion has been made upon you. When will the day come, in which you will be ſteady in your views, decided in your plans, and fixed in a courſe of virtuous actions? If you wiſh that day ever to arrive, retirement muſt firſt bring you home to yourſelves from the diſſipation in which you are continually ſcattered abroad. Then, and only then, you may hope that your character will become uniform, virtuous, and reſpectable. Then will your life begin to proceed in ſuch a train as may fit you for admiſſion into the ſociety of the bleſſed citizens of the heavenly Jeruſalem.

SERMON

SERMON XXXVI.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

On Detraction.

He that will love life and ſee good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they ſpeak no guile. 1 Pet. iii. 10.

THE innumerable miſchiefs produced by the tongues of men, when they are not guarded by the principles of reaſon, and reſtrained by the influence of religion, afford a melancholy evidence of the importance of the admonition contained in the words of the text. The tongue, ſays St. James, though *a little member, is a fire, a world of iniquity.... The tongue no man can tame; a reſtleſs evil,*

evil, full of deadly poiſon. (Jam. iii.) From the tongue proceed falſehoods, perjuries, profane oaths, imprecations, and blaſphemies. *By it we bleſs God and the Father; and by it we curſe men, who are made after the likeneſs of God.* It is the vehicle of uncharitableneſs, malice, calumnies, detractions, and ſo many other evils, that the due government of the tongue forms one of the principal objects of a Chriſtian's attention; inſomuch that the Apoſtle does not heſitate to aſſert, that, *if any man offend not in word, the ſame is a perfect man.*

One vice of the tongue I mean to ſingle out in particular on this occaſion, and hold up to you as an object of deteſtation. It is a vice on which the judgement of men, when they themſelves are not immediately attacked by it, is apt to paſs a very mild ſentence; a vice which is ſometimes ſo blended with amiable qualities, ſo ſupported and ſet off by the powers of wit and humour, that its malice is often diſguiſed, and

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the engaging form under which it is preſented, diverts our attention from the many fatal and irreparable conſequences with which it is conſtantly pregnant.

Already you probably underſtand, that I mean to ſpeak of the vice of detraction, and to addreſs myſelf to thoſe who ſeek to blacken the reputation of their fellow creatures, or, by oblique inſinuations, to tarniſh, in the minds of thoſe who hear them, that fair opinion which their neighbour had hitherto poſſeſſed.

Would to God I may be able to check the progreſs of this prevailing evil! Prevailing indeed it is. An itch for ſlander and ſcandal is common to all ranks of people. Whether it be the fruit of ungenerous reſentment; whether it be owing to a mean ambition of ſeeming witty; whether it proceed from a narrowneſs and poverty of ſoul, which is impatient of merit or ſuperiority in others; or whether it originate in a

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natural cruelty of diſpoſition; certain it is, that from one cauſe or other, this contagious malady every where rages, and that its growth and progreſs are as deſtructive as they are diſgraceful, not only to a Chriſtian, but even to a civilized people.

Did I here undertake to examine minutely all the baſe ingredients which enter into the compoſition of the character of a detractor, I ſhould hardly ever come to a concluſion. I muſt content myſelf, therefore, with endeavouring, in the firſt place, to make you acquainted with the nature and artifices of detraction, by pointing out ſome of the various forms under which it is introduced into converſation: in the ſecond place, I ſhall undertake to demonſtrate, that it ſtands in direct oppoſition to natural juſtice; thirdly, that it argues a want of every generous principle; and laſtly, that it ſtrikes at the root of all the leading virtues of the Chriſtian religion.

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I. When men meet together to enjoy the pleaſures of communication and converſation with each other, pleaſures which are the cement of ſociety, which are applauded by charity and religion, and, if properly conducted, might prove ſo many powerful incentives to goodneſs, we find, unhappily, that, inſtead of dwelling on thoſe topicks of diſcourſe by which they might be improved, or innocently amuſed, they place their chief ſatisfaction in recounting the weakneſſes, failings, and crimes of thoſe who fall within the circle of their knowledge. In almoſt every party and ſociety, we meet with open and unbluſhing ſcandal, perſons whoſe tongues are ſubjected to no reſtraints, who have always a ſtore of malicious anecdotes, of reproaches and contemptuous appellations, ready to be produced, as opportunity ſhall offer, and which, from every ſubject of converſation that is ſtarted, they take occaſion to pour out againſt ſome one or other of their acquaintance. You cannot

not mention trade or buſineſs, for inſtance, but they will relate the frauds and overreachings by which ſuch an one has acquired the wealth which he now poſſeſſes. If you ſpeak of the exerciſes of piety, or the duties of religion, they are ſure to tell you, that ſuch an one, notwithſtanding all her devotion, when ſhe is out of the church, is as full of paſſion and ſelf-love as other people. By theſe tongues of malice, the ſlighteſt appearance of indiſcretion is converted into guilt. If a young woman betray any gaiety or levity in her dreſs or deportment, they will inſtantly pronounce her to be no better than ſhe ſhould be; as they uſually chooſe to expreſs their malignant reflection.

Beſides this bare-faced method of attacking reputations, which is leſs ſucceſsful in proportion as its malice and effrontery render it more diſguſting and deteſtable; the poiſon of detraction is more frequently communicated to the world by a thouſand different vehicles

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which conceal its noxious properties. It is diſguiſed under a variety of ſhapes; but, like an arrow ſhot from the dark, produces equal miſchief. Thus the character of a fellow-creature is often taken away by diſtant hints: a good and generous action is ſtripped of all its merit, by a diſtruſtful look, a ſarcaſtic ſmile, or myſterious whiſper: honour, virtue, and chaſtity, are brought into ſuſpicion by the envious winks and ſneers of thoſe who are paſt the danger of temptation themſelves, or feel themſelves inferior in the accompliſhments of beauty and wit, or the advantages of fortune and reputation.

But the moſt pernicious of all detractors is the man of affected moderation and diſintereſtedneſs. He, by making a ſhow of charity and benevolence, heightens the injury, cauſes the detraction to be more readily credited, and to make a deeper impreſſion on the minds of thoſe who hear it. *Their words are ſmoother than oil*, ſays the Pſalmiſt, *and the ſame*

are darts. (Pſal. liv.) Such men as this, by a pretended diſpoſition towards kind interpretations and favourable opinions, by diſcovering failings with ſeeming unwillingneſs, and extenuating faults which they own cannot be denied, remove inſtantly all doubt from the truth of their aſperſions, and engage their hearers to repoſe confidently on their candour and veracity. I will give you ſome ſpecimens of this good-natured kind of detraction. Such an one, they ſay, is poſſeſſed of many good qualities; what a misfortune it is, that he ſhould be ſo addicted to drunkenneſs and intemperance! Another is a man of great humanity and goodneſs of heart; but it muſt be acknowledged, he is not very delicate in his ideas of ſtrict juſtice, but can eaſily bend them to a conformity with his intereſts. Frequently, the detractor ſeeks to recommend himſelf to the eſteem of his hearers: he diſplays his own imaginary virtues, that his veracity in the accuſation of a brother may appear unqueſtionable.

unqueſtionable. If we believe him, he is of a very tender and compaſſionate nature; he is much afflicted at what has happened; he cannot bear to relate it, and yet he does relate it, and relate it without the leaſt neceſſity; and thus, by a ſemblance of regard, by a mean and flimſy artifice, which the moſt ſhort-ſighted, one would imagine, could eaſily ſee through, he ſucceeds in the defamation of the man whom he affects to compaſſionate.

Such are the arts by which the envious, the idle, the peeviſh, and the thoughtleſs, depreciate that worth which they cannot equal. By artifices thus eaſy, ſordid, deteſtable, and deſtructive of peace, of comfort, and of all the bleſſings of ſocial life, the labours of induſtry are defeated, genius is depreſſed, friendſhips are diſſolved, hatreds fomented, and diſtreſs and ſhame are introduced into the moſt virtuous and happy families.

Neither is this degrading vice confined to any age, ſex, or profeſſion. I am

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ſorry to be forced to allow it; but, if we liſten to the converſation of the ſofter ſex, of thoſe whoſe gentler natures ſhould diſarm them; who would be expected to breathe nothing cruel, nothing but mildneſs, ſweetneſs, and benevolence; yet we find them at leaſt equally prone to this uncharitable conduct, at leaſt equally guilty of this ungenerous, unjuſt, and inhuman vice. Nay, my brethren—but ſhall I venture to ſay it? will it not give offence?—It may—but I come not here to gloſs over the vices of any ſet of men. Detraction is the vice of the Clergy as well as of the Laity; of the religious man, as well as of the worldling. It is frequently obſervable in perſons who are the moſt attached to the exerciſes of devotion; and, perhaps, more frequently in them than in the libertine and the profligate. I wiſh to be underſtood. I do not ſay that detraction is the vice of devotion; Heaven forbid! True devotion is the daughter of charity, juſtice, and truth. But, as

thoſe who make profeſſion of devotion may have, as well as others, their peculiar defects; without aſſerting any thing on the ſubject myſelf, I refer to your own obſervations, to determine whether their moſt ordinary failing be not a proneneſs to detraction. It is at leaſt certain, that this vice is the ruin of many Chriſtians, whoſe lives are in other reſpects regular, virtuous, and edifying. It blaſts all the fruits of their ſanctity and juſtice, and diſhonours the pure and benevolent religion of Chriſt Jeſus. Under one ſhape or other, in fine, it fills up the converſation of mankind of both ſexes. It might ſeem that Chriſtians could not amuſe or entertain themſelves together without diſcovering the ſhame of their brethren in Chriſt, without tearing open their wounds, and cauſing them to bleed again. Cuſtom, likewiſe, has ſo familiariſed men with this ſpecies of iniquity, that it is committed ſeemingly without remorſe.

II. Still,

II. Still, my friends, a little cool reflection muſt convince you, that the vice of detraction ſtands in direct oppoſition to natural juſtice, and evinces a total want of every liberal and generous ſentiment. The detractor robs his neighbour of that to which he has the ſtricteſt right, and of that which he conſiders as his moſt valuable poſſeſſion. Every man, be his private conduct what it may, has a juſt title to a fair and reputable character, as long as he is not convicted of any public offence. Till he make the public witneſſes to his crime, he is accountable to his God only, he is amenable only to the divine tribunal. Whoever, therefore, diſcovers the ſecret crimes of another, is guilty of a cruel robbery, of an injuſtice far more heinous than if by fraud or violence he robbed him of his fortune or poſſeſſions. His poſſeſſions! Alas! to a well-formed mind, what are riches when put in competition with a good name? A fair reputation may lead the moſt deſtitute of men to the acquiſition of wealth; but a character

once loſt is not to be repurchaſed with all the treaſures of the earth. What are the bleſſings of life and health to a man who, being wounded in his reputation, lives only to awaken in the minds of others the remembrance of his ſhame, and to be pointed at as deſpicable and infamous? ſuch a life is but a continual torture. The tongue, therefore, of the detractor robs his neighbour of his moſt precious poſſeſſion, wounds him in the tendereſt part, embitters and empoiſons all the comforts of his preſent exiſtence, and frequently drives him to that ſtate of deſperation, that he plunges deeply into crimes, to which, perhaps, had he not been ſo inhumanly expoſed for the firſt failure, he would never again have conſented.

Have you ever yet been thoroughly penetrated with the truth of theſe reflections, you who ſo readily ſport away the reputation of your neighbour, and ſacrifice his repoſe and happineſs to the petty vanity of appearing ingenious, witty,

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and quick in diſcerning the diſpoſitions and characters of men? — You will tell me that you mean no harm; that you only wiſh to amuſe your company and keep up converſation; or, that you ſpeak from inadvertence and indiſcretion. It may be ſo; and what then?—However, before I admit it to be ſo, I could wiſh you to examine, with ſome degree of attention, whether your tongue be not moved by a ſecret envy. Is there no ſuperiority in your neighbour, that hurts your pride? Perhaps, becauſe he ſeems to have the advantage over you in ſome particulars, you ſeek to make amends to your own ſelf-love by taking from him, on another ſide, as much as may make him ſtill appear to be your inferior. It is a general and a very juſt obſervation, that envy, that ſelf-tormenting and execrable vice, brooding over its own interior anguiſh, and pining at the ſight of others happineſs, finds no way ſo much relief as in venting itſelf in uncharitable diſcourſes.

Thus the tradeſman, who ſees another more ſucceſsful in buſineſs than himſelf; the proud man, who hears honourable teſtimony given to the virtues or ſhining qualities of another; the vain woman, who idolizes her own perſon, and beholds a rival beauty more admired than herſelf; all theſe conſole themſelves by holding up to public view every blemiſh which they can diſcover in a competitor, every defect which their malice can exaggerate, or perhaps invent. Ah! if your conſciences tell you that you muſt trace your detractions from this ſource, you need no other arguments to prove their baſeneſs, ſince, abſtracting from their own natural deformity, they originate in the vileſt paſſion that ever defiled the human breaſt.

But to place your conduct in the moſt favourable point of view; ſuppoſing, as you ſay, that you mean only to entertain your company: Gracious Heaven! can that be the amuſement of a man who ſtill retains any of the fine feelings of humanity!

nity! Amuſe yourſelves! what, with trampling on all the rights of human nature! Amuſe yourſelves with plunging a dagger into the heart of your fellow-creatures! Cruel, horrid ſport! more wantonly inhuman than that of the Pagan tyrants, who, at their ſolemn feſtivals, ſacrificed, in the circus, the lives of many of their ſubjects, to gratify their own brutal eyes, and thoſe of the ſavage ſpectators.

Again, you may ſay, it was inadvertence, indiſcretion: but, can you imagine that this indiſcretion will plead your excuſe? What! when your neighbour's happineſs depends upon the care which you take to curb your tongue, can you go into company without putting a guard upon your lips, without weighing attentively what you ſhall ſpeak, in order to the careful ſuppreſſion of every thing which in its remoteſt tendencies may do him any prejudice? Moſt certainly, unleſs you take theſe precautions, though you harbour no malice in

your hearts, you are accountable for all the miſchiefs which your indiſcretion may produce. Whether malice or indiſcretion give birth to your detraction, its conſequences are equally dreadful. Alas! what advantage is it to your brother, whoſe reputation you deſtroy, that you do it out of levity and wantonneſs, and not with deliberate malice? A weapon which is indiſcreetly brandiſhed about, can make a wound as dangerous as if it were pointed with premeditated deſign.

Moreover, when the reputation of your neighbour is at ſtake, the indiſcretion of which you ſpeak is itſelf a crime. Can any object demand more caution and circumſpection? Ah! my friends, weigh your actions in the ſcales of juſtice, meaſure your conduct by this firſt rule of morality; *Do not to others that which you would not wiſh to be done to yourſelves*; and tell me, would you be content that others ſhould be thus indiſcreet in your regard? Are you ſo

indiſcreet

indiſcreet in expoſing your own reputation? Oh! no; by no means. You know well how nice, how prudent, how cautious you are in concealing your own blemiſhes and defects; and even, if forced to acknowledge any weakneſs in yourſelves, how induſtriouſly you always join ſomething to it which may turn to your credit. You know with what harſhneſs and ſeverity you treat that indiſcretion in others, which is detrimental to your honour. Only conſult your own feelings, when your character is expoſed, and it will be no longer neceſſary to ſhow you the injuſtice of detraction.

III. I proceed, therefore, to obſerve to you, in the next place, that detraction betrays a meanneſs and littleneſs of ſoul, which, to a man who is actuated by any principle of honour, muſt be ſovereignly odious and contemptible. Generally, the detractor would not dare to ſay what he does, before the faces of thoſe perſons with whoſe characters he

makes ſo free in their abſence. They are often the very perſons on whom he fawns with the moſt ſervile adulation. Indeed, my brethren, we ſee men ſhow ſo much eagerneſs, on every occaſion, to expoſe vicious characters, and ſo unanimous in their outeries againſt them, that an unexperienced perſon would imagine that mankind had formed an aſſociation to baniſh vice from the face of the earth. But, behold! a moment after, when thoſe whoſe characters have been painted in ſuch hideous colours, chance to enter the room, they are received with ſuch complacent ſmiles and exterior demonſtrations of reſpect and regard, that the depravity of the moſt abandoned may ſeem to be outdone by the meanneſs of thoſe who have juſt condemned them.

How daſtardly too is the attempt to make an attack on thoſe who are unable to ſtand forth in their own defence! like the inſidious ſerpent, that chooſes the time when the weary traveller lays

him down to repoſe, that he may give him a venomous and mortal ſting.

Theſe conſiderations may ſuffice to give you the utmoſt deteſtation of this ſo pernicious, and yet ſo faſhionable a crime. Even the detractor himſelf deſpiſes others who are guilty of the ſame vice. No one can take them to his friendſhip, or give them his confidence. *The whiſperer*, ſays the Wiſe man, *the whiſperer and the double-tongued is accurſed....he that hearkeneth to* him *ſhall never have reſt, neither ſhall he have a friend in whom he may repoſe.* (Eccleſ. xxviii.)

IV. It will not be neceſſary to detain you much longer in order to ſhow you that detraction ſtrikes at the root of the leading and moſt diſtinguiſhed virtues of the Chriſtian religion: that is abundantly demonſtrated by what has been already obſerved; for, if the detractor be ſo hateful a character in the judgement of men, becauſe he breaks through all the ſacred fences of honour

and natural equity; if the world, corrupt as it is, brand him with infamy; in how odious a light muſt he appear in the eyes of Religion, and of a Religion which is ſo enlightened, ſo juſt, ſo pure, ſo benevolent, as that of Chriſt Jeſus! All the principles of Chriſtian morality are grounded on charity. Its precepts are all dictated by charity. The ſpirit of Chriſtianity is a ſpirit of charity. On the great commandments, of loving God above all things, and our neighbour as ourſelves, the whole Law, and all the oracles of the Prophets depend. Only love God and your neighbour, and be not in pain about the reſt. Love; and you have fulfilled the Law: love; and you have done all that the Prophets, the Apoſtles, and your divine law-giver, Jeſus Chriſt, requires of you.

If, therefore, we contemplate the nature of this Charity, which is the queen of all virtues; if we permit thoſe lovely graces, and beautiful forms of goodneſs, which St. Paul deſcribes as ever attendant

attendant on her, to paſs for a moment in review before our minds, we are immediately ſenſible, that Detraction can never be admitted into ſo amiable an aſſemblage. *Charity is patient*, (1 Cor. xiii.) ſays the Apoſtle. Inſtead of running precipitately to condemn or defame a brother, ſhe waits in ſilence, and ſighs for his converſion from the evil which he has done. *Charity is kind: Charity envieth not....is not puffed up; is not ambitious.* Detraction is moſt ſevere and cruel; is urged on by the pride of affected ſuperiority over others; is begotten by envy, and nouriſhed by the humiliations, misfortunes, and vices of mankind. *Charity ſeeketh not her own*, but rejoiceth in the proſperity of others, and is, conſequently, as delicate and as tender of their concerns as ſhe is of her own, as jealous of any thing which may diſturb their peace, as of that which can be detrimental to herſelf. In a word, it is the delight of Charity to throw a friendly veil over every blemiſh. If

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ſhe can praiſe, ſhe is eager and rejoices to do it: if truth forbid commendation, ſhe is ſilent, and laments in ſecret the misfortune to which ſhe has been witneſs. Oh heavenly Charity! thou moſt excellent, moſt deſirable of all perfections, when wilt thou come, and reign in every heart, and diffuſe thy ſweetneſs into all the converſations and occupations of the children of men!

For your parts, my beloved, I confide in the mercies of God, that the reflections which we have this day made, will introduce charity into your converſation; will engage you to put a bridle upon your tongues, and a guard upon your lips, that no word may ever eſcape them which can be detrimental to any fellow-creature. Alas! my friends, ſhall the tongue which has confeſſed Chriſt Jeſus, the tongue which has renounced the pomps of the Devil, the tongue which daily bleſſes the God of peace and charity in his ſacred temple, the tongue which has been conſecrated by receiving

receiving the precious body of Jeſus, and tinged with his adorable blood—oh! ſhall that tongue be again reſtleſs, dangerous, malicious! ſhall it diſtil gall and bitterneſs againſt your unhappy brethren! What ignominy is reflected on your Religion, if, after having juſt offered to your ſovereign Lord a ſacrifice of prayer and praiſe in the aſſembly of the faithful, you ſhould be ſeen to vomit forth the poiſon of the ſerpent, againſt thoſe whom every conſideration ſhould make moſt dear and reſpectable to you;—againſt thoſe with whom you are moſt cloſely connected by a ſimilarity of nature and faculties, of hopes and fears, of wants and dependencies; by the bands of civil ſociety; by the union of faith, and the participation of the ſame myſterious rites! Every thing in heaven and on earth invites us to charity; invites us to bear with one another, to compaſſionate one another, to ſympathiſe

thiſe one with the other. With charity are aſſociated all the comforts of our preſent exiſtence; and the ſame charity will be to each of us a ſource of never-failing delight in the eternal inheritance of our Redeemer.

SERMON

SERMON XXXVII.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

On the Advantages of Poverty.

When there was a great multitude, and had nothing to eat, Jeſus, calling his diſciples together, ſaith to them: I have compaſſion on the multitude; for, behold, they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat. Mark viii. 1.

A GREAT multitude, my brethren, forgetful of their own corporal neceſſities, wholly intent on ſeeking the kingdom of God, and catching with eagerneſs the words of truth and grace, which fell from the lips of Jeſus, follow him into

into a wilderneſs, and are ſo captivated by his inſtructions, ſo ſenſible of the honour and happineſs of enjoying his company, as to remain, for the ſpace of three days, deaf to the cries of nature, and ſuffer the body to faint for want of ſuſtenance, rather than debar the ſoul from feeding on the doctrines of eternal life. Jeſus is touched with tender commiſeration at the ſight of the objects around him, and works a miracle for their ſupport. Paſs over, my friends, this day with Jeſus into this wilderneſs. Let the poor and the rich paſs thither in imagination, contemplate the ſcene which is exhibited in this day's Goſpel, and return home efficaciouſly moved to the imitation of what they there behold. Let the tenderneſs and beneficence of Jeſus teach thoſe who are poſſeſſed of affluence, to open their hearts to that tender ſenſibility which the diſtreſſes of their fellow-creatures ſhould naturally excite, and liberally to pour forth their ſuperfluities in works of goodneſs and charity.

charity. Let the poor learn to be content in their ſtation, and to prize its advantages: let them learn to ſeek firſt the kingdom of God and his juſtice, and be perſuaded that all things elſe ſhall be added unto them.

Many indeed, my beloved, and great, are the advantages of a poor and humble ſtation. We ſee an evidence of them in the Goſpel before us. While the great ones of the world were revelling, probably, in luxurious and criminal exceſſes; while the Princes of the people and of the Synagogue, ſurrounded by numerous and brilliant attendants and paraſites, dared, with ſupercilious pride, to deſpiſe the incarnate Wiſdom of God, becauſe not diſtinguiſhed by the gaudy trappings of human vanity; theſe poor, theſe deſpiſed, and humble men, became the friends and the aſſociates of Jeſus; were taught and careſſed by him; were nouriſhed from his hand, and ſaw the uncultivated, barren deſert, converted by his

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divine preſence into paſtures of plenty, comfort, and peace.

Ah! my friends, theſe men, before they were acquainted with our Redeemer, looked with an envious and jealous eye on the flattering diſtinctions which are attendant on worldly proſperity. Their hearts mourned within them, when they compared the apparent happineſs of other men with their own diſtreſſes. But things aſſumed a different appearance in the light of revelation, and their ſorrows were changed into joy.

That you, therefore, my beloved, you, in this aſſembly, who are of a poor and lowly condition, may be no longer dejected nor uneaſy in your confined circumſtances, it is my intention to ſhow you this day ſome of the advantages of poverty, by arguments drawn from the dictates of God's eternal wiſdom. To you I addreſs myſelf in particular; but the intereſt of my ſubject is not confined to you only; the reflections I ſhall this day make may prove highly beneficial

cial to men of every condition in life. Such are the viciſſitudes of human things, ſo fluctuating are all temporal enjoyments, that be your condition at this moment ever ſo fortunate, to-morrow's ſun may ſee you overwhelmed with affliction. It is good, therefore, in the day of proſperity, to fortify the mind with thoſe principles which may enable it to meet the hour of trial with evenneſs of temper, with calm reſignation, and cheerfulneſs of heart.

I. When our divine Lord, in the Goſpel of St. Luke, pronounces theſe alarming ſentences: *Wo to you that are rich; for you have your conſolation. Wo to you that are filled; for you ſhall hunger. Wo to you that laugh now, for you ſhall mourn and weep*; (Luke vi.) we muſt not thence infer, that the poſſeſſion of affluence, or a ſtate of earthly proſperity, is incompatible with virtue and ſalvation. No: it is not our condition in life, but the diſpoſition of our hearts, which determines our merit in the judgement

ment of the Moſt High. Riches are undoubtedly bleſſings which deſcend from the throne of God, and, when properly employed, are made an inexhauſtible treaſure in heaven. Of themſelves, neither riches, nor poverty, can ſecure to us ſalvation, or exclude us from it: only the uſe which we make of them, can affect our eternal intereſts. Still, from the ſentences which I have repeated, we may certainly conclude, that poverty is a ſtate in which innocence is more eaſily preſerved, virtue is expoſed to fewer dangers, and, conſequently, ſalvation is more immediately attainable.

The reaſon is evident. Riches furniſh the fewel of that concupiſcence, which glows with ſuch exceſſive ardour, and rages with ſuch ungovernable violence, in the human breaſt. Riches lay open the flattering career of dignities and honours; they are ſtrong incentives of ambition, and the handmaids of every enervating and intemperate

perate pleaſure. How eaſily does pride ſwell the heart of that favourite of fortune, who is raiſed in pre-eminence above his fellow-creatures! How eaſily does he, before whom multitudes cringe in ſervile dependence; he, whoſe moſt degrading vices are exalted by intereſted adulation into diſtinguiſhed virtues; forget his own original inſignificance, and exalt himſelf againſt the Almighty Lord of heaven and earth! Ah! how ſeldom is the voice of truth heard by ſuch an one! and when heard, how feeble is its power in oppoſition to the loud acclamations of flattery which every inſtant break upon his willing ear! With reſpect to intemperate pleaſure, that poiſon of every manly and of every Chriſtian virtue; he has not a wiſh however criminal, but he has the means to gratify it. Every object around him wears a gay and ſmiling aſpect; all that can delight his ſenſes conſpires with his own natural propenſities to betray him to thoſe enemies which

which lie in wait for his deſtruction. Oh! it requires indeed a more than ordinary ſhare of fortitude, a ſtrong and moſt powerful grace, to keep the paſſages of the heart ſecurely guarded againſt the inroads of folly and vice, and keep wiſdom from being diſpoſſeſſed of her dominion in the ſoul.

Truly, my brethren, did you thus view the ſituation of human things, with the eye of faith, and in the light of heaven, your poverty could not give you much uneaſineſs: "What a folly!" you would ſay: "Shall I, a Chriſtian, a citizen of heaven, who have centered all my hopes in that bleſſed inheritance of which Jeſus has taken poſſeſſion for me—ſhall I deſire any thing which would prove an obſtacle to theſe noble purſuits! Shall I wiſh for incumbrances in my paſſage through time to eternity! Shall I ſeek to make that narrow path which leads to life, ſtill more narrow, and to ſtrew it over with more thorns!" Oh! deceitful, inconſiſtent

ſiſtent, heart of man! to wiſh to overcome temptation, and yet judge that poverty a misfortune, which is the ſtrongeſt ſhield that can be oppoſed to its aſſaults!

Chriſtians, we each of us, at the baptiſmal font, renounced the Princes of darkneſs, with all their works and pomps: thoſe ſame evil ſpirits, who are called, in the ſacred ſcriptures, the Rulers of this world. We are now, therefore, paſſing through an enemy's country. But what think you is the conduct of a prudent man, who is neceſſitated to paſs through a land which is in the poſſeſſion of his enemies? Does he chooſe a ſpot in that land for the ſeat of his repoſe and comforts? Does he wiſh to receive preſents from the hands of his enemies? No certainly. He knows, the ſmiles and careſſes of an enemy are frequently more dangerous, more fraught with miſchiefs, than his frowns and his avowed indignation. It is with reluctance that he takes from his

enemies even the neceſſaries of life; for he dreads a latent poiſon in the refreſhment which is ſet before him. Theſe have ever been the ſentiments of the faithful ſervants of Jeſus. "Truly," ſays the pious Author of the Following of Chriſt, "to eat, to drink, to ſleep, to repoſe, and to be ſubject to the other neceſſities of nature, is a great miſery and a grievous affliction to a devout Chriſtian, becauſe he ſighs to be delivered from the ſlavery of ſin."

II. It is a ſecond advantage of poverty, that it frees men from an endleſs variety of cares and perplexities, to which the poſſeſſion of earthly goods muſt neceſſarily expoſe them. Do not imagine, my friends, that peace and comfort are the inſeparable attendants of riches, grandeur, and ſplendour. No: the ſmiling countenance and the gaudy habit are oftentimes aſſumed to conceal an aching heart, and a mind tortured with anxious and diſtreſſing thoughts. Even the pleaſures of the great, on which the poor

man looks with ſo much envy, are frequently no pleaſures to them. The frequent repetition of enjoyments palls the appetite, and converts pleaſure into inſipidity or loathſomeneſs. The labourer, wearied with toil and drudgery, meets the hour of repoſe with a delight which the voluptuous never know: and, when he enters under his humble roof to take his mean repaſt, ſurrounded by his little ſmiling offspring, a joy ſprings up in his mind, which the delicious viands and exquiſite dainties of the moſt refined Epicure could never impart.

In effect, my friends, if we have but clean food, raiment and lodging, what more can the richeſt of mortals enjoy? If he be maſter of a ſumptuous ward-robe, he can wear but one habit at a time. If he poſſeſs many ſplendid manſions, he can be but in one, and but in one apartment of one of them at the ſame inſtant. You do not find that the rich live longer, are more healthy, or ſleep ſounder in their beds, for having twice as much as

they want, or know how to diſpoſe of. All the magnificent ſcenes of nature, of which the grandeur and beauty ſo far ſurpaſs the paltry imitations which art ſubſtitutes in their place, are open to you as to them; and by you more frequently enjoyed, than by the luxurious midnight revellers, of what is uſually called high life.

Add to this, that the wider a man's poſſeſſions extend, the broader is the mark which he ſets up to the arrows of misfortune. The fear leſt caſualties ſhould wound him in ſome tender part,—the dread of ſome unforeſeen revolution taking place in his affairs,—the caprices of fortune, are a ſource of very frequent uneaſineſs and trouble. So true it is that none can be happy unleſs they have learned of Jeſus to be poor in ſpirit, to be diſengaged in affection from earthly ſatisfactions, and lay the ground-work of happineſs in the mind, in the poſſeſſion of virtue, and the teſtimony of a good conſcience. Different, indeed, is

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the language of the world from the maxims of the Goſpel. The world ſays: Happy they who are carried down the tide of life with a proſperous gale; whoſe countenance wears a ſettled ſmile of delight and pleaſure; who ſtand exalted to a diſtinguiſhed pre-eminence among men. The Goſpel ſays, *Bleſſed are the poor in ſpirit; bleſſed are they who mourn*, whoſe cheeks are bedewed with the tears of ſorrow; bleſſed is the meek and humble man, who, becauſe deſpiſed or forgotten by the world, has a better title to the notice, the attention, and the favour of heaven. Liſtening to this diverſity of language, to this oppoſition of ſentiments, by which is it your intereſt to be guided? Certainly, by the unerring maxims of that wiſdom which aſſiſts at the throne of God, the light of which has been diffuſed by the Lord Jeſus over the minds of the children of men.

III. There is yet another advantage which you may make of your poverty, the greateſt of all advantages, and which

I mean for the principal fruit of this diſcourſe. In proportion as you enjoy fewer of the comforts of this life, let your hearts pant with greater eagerneſs after the good things of the Lord in the land of the living. In proportion as the world frowns upon you, labour, by greater aſſiduity in the practice of good works, to ſecure the ſmiles and approbation of heaven. If you find this world to be to you a ſcene of pain and ſorrow, look forward, therefore, continually towards that future world, where the ſigh and the groan ſhall be no more heard, and the Lord ſhall wipe away every tear from the eyes of his ſervants for ever.

But, alas! how oppoſite to this, and how ſhocking to religion and to reaſon, is the general conduct, and frequently the language of the poor, when they are exhorted to the practice of Chriſtian virtues! Perhaps you, my beloved, when urged by your paſtors to a more frequent participation of the divine myſteries,

have

have anſwered, that you were poor and in trouble, and had not ſufficient compoſure of mind. When admoniſhed of the ſhame and guilt which are ever attendant on exceſſive drinking and intemperance, you replied, that it was neceſſary to relieve your hearts from their cares, to drown your ſorrows, to make the hours which could be ſpared from bodily labour paſs away in an agreeable manner. Nay, there is not an injuſtice ſo notorious, nor a crime ſo infamous, but poverty is often pleaded as its excuſe.— But tell me, do you think theſe to be reaſonable pretexts? What! becauſe the world is againſt you, you wiſh to make God your enemy likewiſe! Becauſe, afflicted with tranſitory evils, you take ſhelter in ſin, which is the worſt, the moſt durable of all evils, and the ſting of every other calamity and affliction! Becauſe you go ſorrowing through life, you will have it terminate in eternal death! What! not content with ſuffering here for a ſe-

ries of years, you chooſe to ſuffer eternally from the worm that never dies, and the fire that is never extinguiſhed! Why! this is infatuation even to madneſs. The very motive which ſhould make you embrace virtue with all the fondneſs of affection, and adhere to it as your ſole ſupport and conſolation, induces you to abandon it, and take up the horrors of a guilty conſcience, the excruciating anguiſh of remorſe. The motive which ſhould cauſe you to cling to your God, to make him your protector, your guardian, your guide, your friend, your comforter, that very motive prevails on you to enter into the vile ſervitude of his and your bittereſt enemy. Oh! Chriſtian brother, if there be any one here thus miſerably infatuated, turn your eyes inwardly upon your own ſoul, and become ſenſible of its wretchedneſs. What, alas! are the moſt diſtreſſing calamities of life, when compared with the poverty of that ſoul on which the light of God's coun-

countenance no longer ſhines; which is robbed of the invaluable treaſures of grace, and ſpoiled of the lovely ornaments of ſanctity and juſtice! Run inſtantly to your God, and your all. Be reconciled with Jeſus: place yourſelf under the ſhadow of his wings. With him you have all things: ſeparated from him, a dreadful void of all that is good, deſirable, or delightful.

Cultivate aſſiduouſly every Chriſtian virtue; and, in particular, apply yourſelves to your improvement in thoſe virtues which beſt become your ſtation, and are in you peculiarly graceful. Let meekneſs, obedience, humility, modeſty, patience, and an unremitting attention to peaceful induſtry, be the diſtinguiſhing traits of your character. Study to make yourſelves uſeful members of ſociety. Let the regularity and the edifying tenour of your lives do honour to your Religion. Make your poverty the antidote againſt guilt, and the guardian

of innocence and peace, till the day come, when all human diſtinctions of rank ſhall be done away, when the ſcene ſhall be entirely changed, and your works ſhall follow you, and be your crown, and your glory in the Lord.

SERMON

SERMON XXXVIII.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

On the Paſſions.

As you have yielded your members to ſerve uncleanneſs and iniquity, unto iniquity; ſo now yield your members to ſerve juſtice, unto ſanctification. Rom. vi. 19.

THE Apoſtle, throughout this and the two following chapters of the epiſtle to the Romans, deſcribes, with much energy of language, the diſorders contracted by human nature, from the unhappy diſobedience of our firſt parent; and evinces, with cogent arguments, the neceſſity of warring againſt *the paſſions of ſins, which work in our members, to bring forth*

fruit unto death : exhorting us to *walk not according to the fleſh*, but according to *the law of the ſpirit of life in Chriſt Jeſus*, who hath *freed us from the law of ſin and of death.* (Rom. viii.) In the words of my text, he admoniſhes us to employ thoſe very paſſions which were formerly the ſlaves of iniquity, in the ſweeter, more delightful, and more profitable ſervice of juſtice and ſanctification: for, continues he, *What fruit had you then in thoſe things of which you are now aſhamed? For the end of them is death.*

To yield our members to ſerve juſtice, unto ſanctification, to curb our paſſions, and ſubject them to the control of reaſon and religion, is the moſt important buſineſs of a Chriſtian life. But, although it be a work of which all men muſt acknowledge the neceſſity, a work intimately connected both with preſent and future happineſs; although it be a duty much talked of, and very frequently inculcated; ſtill it is a duty, which in general,

neral, I fear, is little underſtood, and, I am ſure, much leſs practiſed.

I propoſe to myſelf, therefore, in this and the following diſcourſe, to inveſtigate the theory, and give directions for the practice, of the mortification and government of the paſſions. On this day, I will explain to you, in the firſt place, what is meant by the Paſſions: ſecondly, we will briefly conſider, whence ariſes the difficulty of ſubduing them: and, thirdly, you ſhall ſee the neceſſity and importance of this branch of ſelf-government.

I. The paſſions, which are joy, grief, love, averſion, anger, fear, &c. may be properly defined, *Strong emotions of the ſoul, occaſioned by the view of ſome object which is conceived to be good or evil.* This definition conveys a juſt notion of what is meant by the paſſions in general, and abſtracting from their particular tendency.

But, to avoid all danger of miſtake, you muſt obſerve, my brethren, that, in the

the ſtyle of the Sacred Writings, by the paſſions are, for the moſt part, underſtood, not ſimply ſtrong emotions of the ſoul, as above deſcribed, but inordinate emotions and deſires; that is, ſuch as tend to improper objects, or to lawful objects in an undue and intemperate manner. Thus they are underſtood by St. Paul, when he ſays, *I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man. But I ſee another law in my members, fighting againſt the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of ſin, that is in my members.* (Rom. vii.) And by St. James, where he aſks, *Whence are wars and contentions among you? Come they not hence? From your concupiſcences which war in your members?* (Ja. iv.)

A want of attention to this neceſſary diſtinction has cauſed ſome writers on this ſubject to apply to all our natural affections, thoſe noxious properties which the divine oracles attribute to our *inordinate* deſires only; and has led them to believe, that we were bound to aim at

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the utter extirpation of every congenial inclination, to blunt every feeling, and aſpire to a chimerical ſtate of perfection in a kind of ſtoical apathy; whereas the endeavour to root our paſſions utterly out of our frame, would be a vain and ridiculous attempt. They enter into the original conſtitution of our nature; and therefore, as long as we exiſt, ſo long we ſhall, and muſt, have paſſions.

The great Author of Nature gave us theſe paſſions for good and wiſe purpoſes; and, if they be but properly directed and regulated, they may be made ſubſervient to every uſeful end. They are, as it were, the wings of the ſoul: they raiſe us above ourſelves: they make us penetrating, vigorous, earneſt and fervent. They give an energy to all our faculties, a dignity to our ſentiments; and dictate to us a perſuaſive language, to which, in our calmer moments, we never attain.

You will be convinced, that the paſſions in themſelves are good and uſeful,

and

and at the ſame time inſeparable from human nature, if you conſider, that our bleſſed Lord himſelf, who, when he took to himſelf our nature, could not be in any degree tainted by our corruption, was not without paſſions. He was many times touched with pity and compaſſion. He occaſionally rejoiced. Frequently he grieved in ſpirit; he ſorrowed, and he wept. On ſome occaſions, he ſhowed marks of anger and indignation. Indeed, the ſpirit of God gives us to underſtand, from one of the inſpired canticles of David, that it is poſſible to be angry and not ſin.

The paſſions, therefore, my brethren, are not in themſelves radically vicious: but they are uſeful, or deſtructive, in proportion to the object about which they are employed, or the manner in which they are exerted. Like fire and water, they are good ſervants, but the worſt maſters by which we can be governed. They may be juſtly enough compared to the winds, which, while they

they blow a moderate gale, waft the veſſel ſafe into harbour, but, when they riſe into a ſtorm, overwhelm, and bury it in the deep. It is therefore the office of reaſon, enlightened by the doctrines of Revelation, and ſupported by divine grace, to keep them in a ſtate of proper ſubordination.

But, although our Reaſon be the nobleſt of all the powers of our ſouls, the diſtinguiſhing privilege of man in the viſible creation, and deſigned by the Author of our being to be the ſupreme moderator, the miſtreſs and queen of all our other faculties; ſtill, alas! ſo unfortunately circumſtanced is human nature in this its fallen ſtate, that, unleſs we offer to ourſelves the utmoſt violence, the paſſions are frequently too impetuous and too powerful to be ſubjected to any kind of control. Various are the cauſes which contribute to diminiſh the power of reaſon, and to ſtrengthen the force of paſſion in our hearts. The firſt ſource of this misfortune was our unhappy re-

bellion

bellion againſt God, in the perſon of our firſt parent. No ſooner did man revolt againſt his Sovereign Lord, but inſtantly his paſſions rebelled againſt himſelf, and, from being the agents and the inſtruments of reaſon, became its rulers and its tyrants. Prompt to ruſh forward to the embraces of apparent enjoyments, without waiting for the cooler determinations of the underſtanding, the paſſions frequently hurry us along towards improper objects; and, even in purſuing ſuch objects as are in themſelves good and advantageous to our being, they are conſtantly prone to exceſs, and to a blind, headſtrong, and dangerous impetuoſity. On this account, the ſacred oracles repreſent our paſſage through this ſtage of our exiſtence, by images drawn from the alarms and ſolicitudes of a military life, ſince we are placed in ſuch a ſtate, that almoſt every object around us may, by inflaming our paſſions, betray us into the power of our bittereſt enemies.

Moreover, to the power of paſſion, thus early eſtabliſhed, and inceſſantly increaſing, almoſt every man, in ſome parts of his life, adds new ſtrength, by the voluntary indulgence of appetites which, in proportion as they are gratified, enlarge their dominion, and multiply their demands. Every act of compliance with our ſenſual inclinations, facilitates a ſecond compliance; every new ſtep towards depravity, is made with leſs reluctance than the former; and thus the deſcent to a life merely ſenſual and brutal, is perpetually accelerated.

It is evident, therefore, that to guard againſt the aſſaults of temptation; to diſcover the illuſions of inordinate ſelf-love; to ſtrip every object of the falſe colouring in which paſſion may exhibit it to our view; to preſerve the ſoul from being enthralled by the cares of avarice; to wean the heart from its natural attachment to the joys of intemperance; to ſhut the ears againſt the lulling ſounds of deceitful flattery, and withſtand the

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tempting ſight of proſperous wickedneſs, requires the moſt determined fortitude, together with the niceſt circumſpection and unwearied vigilance. It is the proper exertion of theſe faculties of the ſoul, relatively to the particular ſpecies of danger, or the peculiar mode of attack, to which our virtue is or may be expoſed, that conſtitutes the whole art of governing the paſſions. Study, therefore, my beloved friends, ſtudy with the utmoſt aſſiduity, and be indefatigable in your endeavours to acquire the truly uſeful ſcience of ſelf-government.

III. This is indeed an attainment devoutly to be wiſhed: on it depends your preſent and your future peace, your happineſs both in time and in eternity. Each day's experience and obſervation of human conduct furniſhes new arguments to demonſtrate its importance. With reſpect to truth and virtue, thoſe ſuperiour and noble objects, which were deſigned to be the ſupport, the comforts, and the ornaments of our being, how feeble are

their

their impreſſions on that mind in which Reaſon is diſpoſſeſſed of her dominion, and Paſſion uſurps the throne! To ſuch a mind, the excellencies and beauties which Revelation diſplays to our view, in a future world, appear, alas! without dignity or charms. Amidſt the groveling indulgences of intemperance, the tumult of inordinate deſire, and the riot of the ſenſual appetites, that wiſdom and thoſe graces which lead to immortality, can never reſide. The man who ſuffers himſelf to be ſwayed by any violent inclination, becomes degraded to a level with the brute creation. Though formed in the beginning, but a ſmall degree inferior to the Angelic Spirits, he has forgotten his native dignity, and, to his eternal grief and ſhame, is compared to the beaſts of the field, and is made like unto them.

Nor are the baneful conſequences of indulging the paſſions experienced hereafter only, in the excluſion of the ſlaves of their unruly appetites from the participation

cipation of heavenly bliſs, and their confinement in that abyſs of miſeries where there is eternal weeping and gnaſhing of teeth; but all the evils, even of this preſent life, are derived from the ſame ſource. It is the violence of paſſion which empoiſons the enjoyments of individuals, troubles the peace and deſtroys the order of ſociety, and ſtrews the paths of life with ſo many tribulations, as to render it indeed a vale of tears. Almoſt every public calamity originates in ſome violent paſſion. The paſſions erect the ſtandard of rebellion and civil diſcord; they enkindle the rage of war; they deluge the earth with blood. In a word, turn over the annals of human tranſactions; and what are they, for the moſt part, but a recital of the crimes and of the miſeries of mankind, becauſe they are the hiſtory of the workings of their paſſions?

If from public life we deſcend to private conduct, though there the lamentable effects of ungoverned paſſions cannot

not be equally extenſive, yet we ſhall find them not leſs deſtructive. When envy, jealouſy, anger, or the deſire of revenge, are ſuffered to enter into any family, and gain the aſcendant, they immediately baniſh from under that roof, all domeſtic peace and enjoyment. Inſtantly, the huſband, the wife, and the children, with all their connexions, aſſociates, friends, and dependents, are rendered miſerable.

Contemplate one of theſe more violent perturbations of ſoul. What is immoderate anger, for inſtance, but a ſhort madneſs? View a perſon in a rage: look fixedly, if you can bear to do it, on ſo ſhocking a ſpectacle: ſee the rolling eyes, the livid countenance, the frantic geſtures, the features all diſtorted into an appearance moſt frightful and horrible; ſo horrible, that, were the angry man, in the paroxyſms of his rage, but to look in a glaſs, and behold himſelf in that ſtate, the mixture of fear and ſhame which muſt ariſe from the obſervation of his

his own figure, might effect his cure, or at leaſt conduce more to his reformation, than the moſt cogent reaſoning and eloquent perſuaſion.

If we watch the progreſs of any of the ſenſual paſſions, which are of a nature more mild and gentle; if we ſee a man addicted to intemperance, drunkenneſs, or impurity; we may obſerve how gradually his paſſion leads him on to confirmed guilt and everlaſting infamy. One indulgence makes him unhappy without another; that makes a third neceſſary; and ſo on, till his peace of mind is wholly deſtroyed, and corruption ſpreads through his heart. He ſees his fortune diſſipated, his health irremediably impaired, his conſtitution broken, his character debaſed: he loaths himſelf, and, in the moment of reflexion, feels all his miſeries heightened by the ſharpeſt ſtings of cruel remorſe: the worm that never dies has ſeized upon his heart; the infernal fire begins to kindle within him: and yet—oh! deplorable infatuation!

oh! terrible judgements of a deſpiſed and injured God!—yet, he remains wedded to the deſtructive object of his criminal embraces, till death deliver him up to the miniſters of eternal wrath, in that abyſs of perdition, where no order, but everlaſting horror, dwells. Alas! what multitudes do we behold every where around us, in this opulent and luxurious city, daily purſuing this fatal courſe with blind and headlong ſteps!

On this melancholy part of my ſubject I ſhall dwell no longer than juſt to admoniſh you, that in no ſtation, and in no period of life, muſt you ever think yourſelves ſecured from the miſeries which are derived from ungoverned paſſions. In youth indeed particularly, when Pleaſure puts forth her alluring bloſſoms on every ſide, when every object ſhines with the gloſs of novelty—in youth you are the moſt likely to be ſeduced by falſe appearances of good. But the danger is not confined to that ſeaſon: the attachments and paſſions of advanced

years, are in general more ſober, and tend perhaps to objects more uſeful and valuable, than the paſſions of youth, but are for the moſt part equally dangerous. The eager purſuit of worldly intereſts too often begins to exert a power, which extends its malignant influence, with increaſing miſchiefs, even over the laſt ſtage of life, when the mind would naturally be ſuppoſed to be more tranquil, and the heart wholly centered in the riches, bleſſings, and joys of eternity. Hence we ſo often ſee men, in the vale of years, in the chills of age, more tenacious of thoſe poſſeſſions which they know muſt ſoon be parted with for ever, than they were in the vigour of youth, when their lively ſpirits gilded every opening proſpect, and hope held out before them an extenſive field of enjoyment. Remember, therefore, that to the laſt moment of life, the diſcipline of guarding the heart againſt the dominion of paſſion, is equally important, and muſt never be relaxed.

What are the particular methods of enforcing this diſcipline, we ſhall conſider in a ſubſequent diſcourſe. For the preſent, I ſhall conclude by recommending to your ſerious conſideration, the calamities which you have ſeen brought upon others by ungoverned paſſions, and the evils which you have experienced from them in yourſelves. See, my beloved friends, when you return home, what are your peculiar propenſities, and what are the miſchiefs which they have produced in your lives. Examine what progreſs you have hitherto made in the ſcience of ſelf-government. Grant Heaven, you may not diſcover, that till now you have been almoſt wholly unacquainted with the firſt rudiments of a branch of knowledge which is more neceſſary to you, more uſeful and ornamental than the moſt conſummate ſkill in your reſpective profeſſions; than all the elegancies and refinements of polite learning, and all the diſcoveries of philoſophy from the beginning of the world! And, when

you make this enquiry, pray with all the fervour of your ſouls, that a divine light may deſcend from above, to enable you to diſcover your own weakneſſes, and grace to fortify your minds for carrying on a conteſt, which will end only with your mortal lives, but which, if your endeavours are crowned with victory, will ſecure to you the eternal poſſeſſion of a bliſsful inheritance in the kingdom of Chriſt.

SERMON

SERMON XXXIX.

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

On the Means of ſubduing the Paſſions.

Brethren, we are debtors, not to the fleſh, to live according to the fleſh; for, if you live according to the fleſh, you ſhall die: but, if by the ſpirit you mortify the deeds of the fleſh, you ſhall live. Rom. viii. 12.

THE debt, of which the Apoſtle here ſpeaks, is no other than the obligation of labouring to maintain, adorn, improve, and perfect, the being which we have received from the bounty of heaven. Agreeably to this idea, we ſhould each of us conſider our body and ſoul as a depoſit committed to our care; and ſhould look upon ourſelves as appointed

by the divine Providence to procure for them whatever is neceſſary or advantageous. Our great buſineſs is to lead both body and ſoul to the enjoyment of their laſt end and ſovereign happineſs: for happineſs is the end and aim of our being; and ſo good is our God to his creatures, that, in all the variety of his injunctions, he has their happineſs ſolely in view; and when he inflicts upon them any puniſhment, it is only in conſequence of their refuſing proffered bliſs, and chooſing to be wretched.

"Well then," methinks I hear the man of pleaſure reply, "if it be laid down as a principle, that happineſs ought to be the primary object of human purſuit, I, therefore, who go cheerfully through life, who have not a wiſh which I do not ſeek to gratify, who follow pleaſure witherſoever her ſmiles invite me, I anſwer the end of my being better far than thoſe gloomy, ſelf-denying ſouls, who voluntarily abſtain from taſting half the ſweets which the Creator hath ſcattered

tered with a liberal hand along the paths of life."

It is true, ſenſual man, you aim at happineſs: but will the track you purſue ever lead you to it? The reflections which I made on this ſubject laſt Sunday, were abundantly ſufficient to convince you that it never can. For a moment you gratify the inclinations of the body, of the more ignoble part of your being. But you have a ſoul, which is not yet content, which ſtill is reſtleſs and uneaſy. You have reaſon, a monitor within you, whoſe importunities give you much diſturbance in your ſcenes of ſenſual pleaſure. You have a conſcience, which, in the moments when you are at leiſure to liſten to it, whiſpers to your ſoul, that yours are not the ways of peace and joy. You have, moreover, an hereafter to provide for; and that hereafter ſhall never have an end. The happineſs, conſequently, to which you ſhould chiefly aſpire, is the happineſs of your future ſtate. You are not placed on earth to

gratify preſent deſires, but to fit yourſelves for the fruition of the joys of immortality.

Yes, my beloved friends, this is the grand object; this is the juſtice we owe to ourſelves. To this we are debtors: and the debt is diſcharged, not by living *according to the fleſh; for, if you live according to the fleſh, you ſhall die. But, if by the ſpirit you mortify the deeds of the fleſh, you ſhall live;* you ſhall enjoy that portion of human comforts which this ſtate of probation will admit of, and at length be received into the abodes of true and permanent felicity.

We will now, therefore, proceed to conſider the means which we muſt employ to enable the ſpirit to mortify the deeds of the fleſh, and to exerciſe unlimited control over all the affections and deſires of our ſouls.

The whole ſcience of governing the paſſions conſiſts, firſt, in aſcertaining the proper objects of their purſuit; ſecondly, in curbing their over-great eagerneſs

gerneſs and impetuoſity. For theſe ends, my brethren,

I. If you have conceived a paſſion for any particular object; if there be any enjoyment, of whatever kind, which attracts your deſires; pauſe a while, and, calling in reaſon to your aſſiſtance, coolly conſider, what is the real value of that which you ſo eagerly purſue. If it be anger, hatred, jealouſy, or fear, which agitates your ſoul, reflect, what is the real importance of the injury which you have received, of the loſs which you have ſuſtained, or apprehend you ſhall ſuſtain, &c. Certain it is, that all the dangerous paſſions which torment our being, and deſtroy our ſouls, proceed from the erroneous opinions which we form concerning what is good and what is evil in life. We connect with certain objects the ideas of pleaſure and happineſs, becauſe our eyes are dazzled by their brilliant appearance; or, becauſe thoſe with whom we aſſociate, expreſs their admiration of them, we

fooliſhly admire them likewiſe. Whitherſoever the crowd leads, we precipitately follow. We fly from every ſhadow at which we ſee others tremble; and thus we are frequently hurried into eager conteſts, about things which, in themſelves, are of no value, merely becauſe we will not be at the pains of judging for ourſelves, or forming a true eſtimate of things, by ſtripping them of all borrowed or imaginary colouring.

To remedy this evil. "Whenever," ſays the Author of *The Spiritual Combat*; (a work which cannot be too often peruſed by ſuch as wiſh to ſubdue their paſſions, and to attain to Chriſtian perfection;) "whenever any object preſents itſelf before you, let the underſtanding conſider and examine it leiſurely and coolly, before the will come to any determination, either of embracing it if it appear engaging, or of rejecting it if it wear a forbidding aſpect: for, while the underſtanding is yet unſeduced by paſſion, it can, without

" without difficulty, diſtinguiſh truth " from falſehood; it can deſcry the evil " which lurks under the veil of an ima- " ginary good, and the good which lies " concealed under an appearance of " evil." For want of this precaution, if the will be ſuffered either to love or hate, before the underſtanding has weighed the merits or demerits of the object, the clouds of paſſion will ſo thicken about the mind, that it cannot pretend to form any true judgement: and thus, " the two nobleſt powers of the " ſoul roll round, as it were, in a circle " of illuſion, from error to error, from " darkneſs to darkneſs."

To be convinced of the importance of this admonition, you need only take notice, that the young and the ignorant have always the moſt violent paſſions. Why ſo? Principally becauſe, in a more advanced period of life, the knowledge which is acquired from a longer acquaintance with the world, moderates their impetuoſity. Experience, (and

experience is a miſtreſs whoſe leſſons will be attended to) experience diſcovers the emptineſs of all thoſe pleaſures, and the trifling importance of thoſe evils, which excite ſo much ſtrife and commotion among mankind.

Ah! my friends, do not you wait till experience furniſh you with this knowledge. That will be buying wiſdom at a very dear rate indeed. Acquire it now by reflection. Be convinced, that there is nothing on earth worth contending for with any great eagerneſs. Perſuade yourſelves now in good time, that the friendſhip of God, and the enjoyments of truth and virtue, are the chief, nay, the only real happineſs of a rational being. Next to theſe, eſteem, above all other bleſſings, a contented mind and a peaceful life. If you try every pleaſure, indulge every deſire, and run the whole round of faſhionable diſſipation, you will ſit down, at laſt, wearied and ſpent with fruitleſs labour, and come to this concluſion, that all is vanity and affliction

tion of ſpirit, excepting only virtue and the favour of Heaven. Why then ſhould you not make the concluſion now, and preſerve yourſelves from that guilt and wretchedneſs, with which the paſſions, when unreſtrained, are unavoidably attended?

II. Another effectual method of calling off your paſſions from the purſuit of improper and unworthy objects, is to meditate often on the vanity of the world, the ſhort continuance of life, and the near approach of death, judgement, and eternity. Such meditations as theſe will take away that imaginary degree of importance which we are apt to affix to temporal things; and then much of our attachment to them muſt be conſequently abated. How abſurd muſt it ſeem to be contending about the trifles of a day, while we ought to be preparing for a higher exiſtence! Truly, my friends, it is the want of a lively faith, which is the cauſe of all our errors and misfortunes in this particular. Did we conſider all that

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paſſes with time, as the ſmoke, as the vapour, which has no ſubſtance; were we feelingly convinced, that this world and all its concerns are mean, trifling, inſignificant; that ſalvation is our weighty buſineſs; and that, in the twinkling of an eye, we may enter into the joys or miſeries of eternity; ah! with theſe reflexions preſent to our minds, when we behold men irritated by the injuries which they receive from one another, jealous of others advantages, envious of their happineſs; when we behold them panting after the riches and honours of the earth, or intent on the gratification of intemperate appetites, and wallowing in ſenſual enjoyments; inſtead of being tempted to imitate their conduct, we ſhould pity their weakneſs: we ſhould look upon them as children quarrelling together about painted toys and baubles, which their infant years, and the imbecility of their reaſon, make them conſider as matters of vaſt importance. A little

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child, in which the greateſt misfortunes, the loſs of its parents, for inſtance, the being deprived of its inheritance, or the decay and diſtreſſes of its family, can excite no emotions of grief or concern, is rouſed, agitated, and piqued to the heart, if you take from it its ſilly toys and playthings. And the ſame folly is obſervable in the generality of Chriſtians: touch but their temporal concerns, or hold up to their view the frivolous goods and enjoyments of the earth, and their paſſions are in violent agitation; they are all life, vigour, and fervour; while the loſs of their heavenly inheritance, of that patrimony which Jeſus purchaſed for them with his blood, gives them, apparently, no manner of concern. They ſuffer themſelves to be excluded from the kingdom of Heaven, deprived of its invaluable treaſures and infinite enjoyments; and they ſuffer it without emotion.

Oh! my friends, why have you paſſions? For what purpoſe were your hearts

hearts made ſuſceptible of them, but that they might invigorate you in the purſuit of objects worthy your immortal ſouls? Direct your paſſions to thoſe objects, and then give them full ſcope. If you be inclined to love; love, in the firſt place, that beauty which is perfect and never-fading: love infinite truth, wiſdom, and excellence: love your God above all things; and let every other object of your affections have a reference to him, and be loved in proportion as it tends to him. Seek after reputation and fame. Endeavour to conciliate the eſteem of your Creator, the only unerring judge of merit, the fountain of all honour.—Be eager to gain the applauſe of the court of Heaven. Be ambitious; but ſtudy to exalt yourſelves to a diſtinguiſhed pre-eminence in the kingdom of Chriſt. This is, indeed, a laudable ambition.—Rejoice; but let it be in the friendſhip of your Lord, and in the teſtimony of a good conſcience.—Grieve; but let your firſt tears flow from

from a heart melted with compunction for having violated the divine law.—Be covetous of true riches; lay up a treaſure in the realms above; a treaſure which no ruſt can conſume, no injuſtice uſurp.—Look with a holy envy on the glory and felicity of the ſaints who are gone before you to bliſs; and let that paſſion ſpur you on to emulate their glory, by cultivating their virtues, and abounding in their good works.—Your paſſions, thus directed, will raiſe your ſouls above all ſublunary things, elevate them from earth to heaven, and unite them for ever to their laſt end and happineſs.

Next to virtue and future happineſs, which are the principal objects to which your paſſions muſt be directed, you may innocently indulge a moderate degree of paſſion for other objects, provided they are capable of being referred, and of tending, to good. I ſay, a moderate degree of paſſion; for you muſt ever preſerve that vigour of mind which may

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enable you to reſtrain your deſires from any attempt to paſs beyond the limits marked out by reaſon and by the divine law. For this purpoſe,

III. Oppoſe early their beginnings. Never make light of any deſire, which you feel is gaining ſuch progreſs in your heart, as to threaten entire dominion. Though innocent, blandiſhing, gentle, when firſt it ſteals into your boſom; unleſs carefully watched, it will advance too far, and at length pierce your ſoul with many ſorrows. Every one knows with what facility he could once have ſubdued a paſſion, which now is fatal to his peace, and baffles all his efforts to ſubdue it, had he not cheriſhed the viper in his boſom with unguarded fondneſs, till it gave him a venomous and mortal bite.

With regard to objects which have a tendency to excite unchaſte deſires, this precaution is particularly neceſſary for your ſafety. Fly without a moment's heſitation, precipitately fly from every ſuch

ſuch object, or your virtue is certainly loſt. To parley with ſuch an enemy, is to be entirely vanquiſhed. Here the ſmalleſt ſpark, if not extinguiſhed in time, muſt produce a general conflagration.

Indeed all our paſſions are gentle enough in their riſe; their beginnings are flattering and treacherous; while the evils which they bring with them, at firſt lie concealed. I cannot, therefore, too often repeat how neceſſary it is, that we ſhould ever adhere to that ſage maxim, *Reſiſt the beginnings*: for, when by time and habit the evil is become inveterate, the application of a remedy is frequently unavailable. The water which iſſues through a ſmall chink may be eaſily ſtopped; but, if neglected, the aperture is widened by the force of the ſtream, till the fence is at length thrown down, and the flood is at liberty to deluge the plains.

IV. Maintain an habitual power of ſelf-government, by conſtant voluntary privations.

privations. Abſtain ſometimes from enjoyments which are innocent in themſelves. In every ſatisfaction obſerve moderation. By this unremitting aſſiduity you will ſupport the aſcendant of reaſon, and ſecure its liberty and independence. The man who allows himſelf on all occaſions to go to the utmoſt limit of ſafety and innocence, will infallibly be hurried beyond it, when ſome violent paſſion ſhall ariſe in its might, and ſhake his ſoul.

V. Laſtly, be perſuaded that all your own endeavours for regulating your paſſions will prove unſucceſsful, unleſs aſſiſted by his grace who holds the heart of man in his hand, and can turn its inclinations whitherſoever he pleaſeth. Therefore, let your caution and vigilance be ever accompanied by earneſt prayer to God. In our preſent imperfect and fallen ſtate, it is not without much difficulty that we can diſcover all the diſorders of our own hearts; to rectify them is utterly beyond our power.

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Have recourſe then, in the hour of temptation, have recourſe, with humble minds, to the throne of Grace. Beg light and ſtrength from above. Fear not, leſt your requeſt be denied. Jeſus hath promiſed to grant the petition of the pious, the upright, the humble ſuppliant. While you labour to act your part with becoming reſolution, entreat the Father of Mercies to forgive your returning weakneſſes: to enrich your ſouls with the ſeven gifts of his Divine Spirit, which may enable you ſo to govern the emotions of your hearts, that you may proceed, without any very conſiderable interruptions, in a ſteady courſe of piety and goodneſs, and that, mortifying by the ſpirit the deeds of the fleſh, you may live in peace and comfort here, and live in bliſs eternally hereafter.

SERMON

SERMON XL.

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

On Afflictions.

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9 Sep 90

God is faithful, who will not ſuffer you to be tempted above that which you are able; but will make alſo with temptation iſſue, that you may be able to bear it. 1 Cor. x. 13.

THE temptations to which the Apoſtle more particularly alludes in this paſſage, are the inconveniencies, difficulties, and afflictions, to which the firſt Chriſtians were expoſed, in conſequence of their attachment to the Religion of Jeſus: and he gives the Corinthians

thians this comfortable aſſurance, that the grace of Heaven will never fail to ſtrengthen their endeavours, and enable them to overcome theſe, and every other kind of temptation and trouble, with which they ſhould be moleſted in their journey through life.

A conviction and frequent meditation of this truth, ſhould be likewiſe our ſolace in diſtreſs, our ſupport in tribulation. It is a conſolation which we much need: for diſtreſs and tribulation in various ſhapes we all of us muſt meet with. The heart of man could wiſh, that, ſince Jeſus ſuffered ſo much for us, his ſufferings might have exempted us from afflictions, and merited for us the privilege of purſuing our way to the heavenly Jeruſalem, free from pain, unmoleſted by care, in a ſmooth and flowery path of eaſe, content, and pleaſure. But let us not amuſe ourſelves with fond and idle wiſhes. Suffer we muſt on this ſide of the grave. *All that will live godly in Chriſt Jeſus, ſhall ſuffer*

ſuffer perſecution. (2 Tim. iii.) To make our ſufferings meritorious or not, depends upon ourſelves, with the aid of divine grace: but to ſuffer, or avoid ſufferings in this life, is not left to our own choice. Divine Providence has ſo blended together the goods and evils of this ſtage of our exiſtence, that each individual, even thoſe whoſe condition is apparently the moſt fortunate, muſt meet with difficulties and troubles. A ſalutary bitterneſs is mingled with all the ſweets of life.

If a man be advanced to an exalted ſtation in the world, he finds his cares and perplexities begin inſtantly to increaſe and thicken around him; he becomes the mark againſt which envy and malice point all their empoiſoned ſhafts, and frequently trembles on the brink of the eminence to which he has juſt attained. The lowly walks of life are clouded with humilitations and contempt, and abound with tribulations and ſorrows too obvious to require an enumeration.

Public life is a ſcene of ſolicitudes, uneaſineſſes, tumults, and diſtractions. Solitude has its gloomy hours, its diſguſts, and repinings. The married ſtate is embittered oftentimes by unevenneſſes of temper and diſpoſition, by antipathies, diſcord, and ſtrife. A ſingle life has its various difficulties to ſtruggle with, and dangers to encounter. Friendſhip is expoſed to diſſimulation and perfidy. Devotion likewiſe has its times of dryneſs, repugnance, and diſtaſte. In a word, look abroad into the world, and you behold the children of Adam all bearing a heavy burthen; you ſee all the paths of men ſtrewed over with ſharp and painful thorns.

Deſtined, therefore, as we are, to ſuffer, it is ſurely our intereſt to make a merit of our ſufferings, by receiving them with calm reſignation to the appointments of Heaven. To bring you to this temper of mind; to animate your endeavours to reap real advantages from the ſhare of afflictions which is allotted

to you on the earth, is the object of this and the two following diſcourſes; in which I ſhall combat the arguments which men generally alledge as the excuſe for their impatience; and oppoſe to them the evidence of the doctrine laid down by St. Paul, in the words of my text. Give me your attention, Chriſtian brother; for, whoever you may be, to you the ſubject is highly intereſting. Alas! it is not only the intemperate uſe of the pleaſures of life, which cauſes the ruin of thoſe who are eternally loſt; the perdition of thouſands is entirely owing to the unchriſtian uſe which they make of their afflictions.

Nothing is more frequent than to hear thoſe, whom the Lord hath viſited with afflictions, attempt to juſtify their murmurings and impatience, by alledging their natural weakneſs. They acknowledge and lament, that they have not ſtrength of mind ſufficient to ſupport their misfortunes. "They could wiſh," they ſay, "to be leſs ſenſible to

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pain and ſuffering. They know that there is, in ſome characters, a happy inſenſibility, which makes them proof againſt the arrows of adverſity.—But what can they do? They did not make their own hearts: they have a natural ſoftneſs of temper: their feelings are eaſily hurt; and they know that God is too juſt to condemn them for that impatience, which is their misfortune, rather than their choice."

I. Theſe apologies for impatience will not only appear to be entirely miſplaced in the mouth of a Chriſtian, but evidently vain and frivolous, if we conſider, that, when our Redeemer commands his diſciples to carry with ſubmiſſion and love the croſſes which he hath appointed for them, he makes no exception in favour of thoſe who have a particular ſoftneſs of temper, or a ſpecial repugnance to oppoſition, difficulty, and pain. He hath not enacted the law of patience to make it oblige thoſe only who can obſerve it with the

leaſt trouble, and exempt from it ſuch as find difficulty in their ſubmiſſion: but, without diſtinction, he hath commanded all, who wiſh to be united to him, to deny themſelves, to take up their croſſes, and follow him; whether nature, pride, or philoſophy, have given them ſtrength and reſolution; or a ſoftneſs and delicacy of diſpoſition render their afflictions peculiarly diſtreſſing.

Nay, my beloved friends, an exception of that kind, were it once admitted, would defeat the very purpoſes of Providence, in meaſuring out afflictions to the children of men in this ſtage of their exiſtence. The perſons who are thus particularly averſe from trouble and pain, are in greater need of ſufferings, and will be more benefited by afflictions, than the ſtrong and the reſolute. The ſufferings which your Redeemer allots you, are the very remedy for your weakneſſes; and your repugnance to them only proves them to be more neceſſary for you. It is becauſe you are

weak, becauſe even the ſhadow of difficulty terrifies your imaginations;—it is for theſe very reaſons, that your Saviour will have you to paſs through the furnace of tribulation. The ſtrong and the perfect need not be thus formed to conſtancy in virtue; theſe trials are particularly neceſſary for the imperfect and the weak.

Conſider a moment, whence ariſes this delicate ſenſibility of which you complain. Undoubtedly it originates in an inordinate ſelf-love. It is the reſult of a diſpoſition to grant every indulgence to nature, and to ſacrifice nothing to truth and to virtue. It is nouriſhed by fancy, caprice, and humour; and betrays a mind which is wholly bent on the enjoyment of preſent repoſe. Ah! then, my friends, if this be your diſpoſition; if in you this miſguided ſelf-love be found to predominate; afflictions are abſolutely neceſſary to heal your diſtempered hearts. Had not the Lord in his mercy afflicted your body

with that ſickneſs, for inſtance, with that continual languor, which makes the world inſipid to you; had he not involved you in thoſe loſſes and failures in your buſineſs, which open your eyes to ſee the vanity of human things;—had he not defeated your flattering ſchemes, which, if ſucceſsful, would, by increaſing your wealth, have increaſed your dangers;—had he not torn from your embraces, by death, or other accidents, that object which you might have purſued with a criminal paſſion;—had he not cauſed thoſe days to be filled up by neceſſary toil and drudgery, which, in a ſtate of independence, might have been conſumed in iniquity, and ſacrificed to deſtructive pleaſures!—in a word, had not your God thrown ſome obſtacle in the way in which you were running to perdition;—ah! 'tis more than probable, your virtue would have been irrecoverably loſt. You, who in the bitterneſs of life, in its pains and ſorrows, ſtill ſuffer your affections

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to cling ſo cloſely to it, what would you have done in worldly happineſs and peace, while all went ſmoothly on, when every object ſmiled upon you, and invited you to turn your attention from the good things of a future life, and to reſt in preſent enjoyments! When even afflictions, which naturally ſhould make the world ſo diſguſting, cannot compel you to run to Jeſus, and to ſeek for happineſs in his friendſhip, ah! whither would the tide of proſperity have carried you! Depend upon it, that weakneſs, or, to call it by its true name, that inordinate ſelf-love, which makes you ſo ſenſible to pain and ſuffering, would have made you more ſenſible to pleaſure, more open to the ſeducing charms of ſenſual indulgence, more eaſily captivated by worldly proſperity.

To pretend, therefore, that we are weak and delicate, is no excuſe for impatience under the preſſure of temporal evils. That weakneſs of heart origi-

nates in the weakneſs of our faith. A Chriſtian ſoul muſt be ſtrong and valiant, collected in itſelf againſt all the menaces of poverty, infamy, pain, diſtreſs, perſecution, and death: it may be oppreſſed, but can never be ſubdued. Amidſt the ruins of human greatneſs, in the privation of every earthly enjoyment, no earthly power can take from us the treaſure of faith and grace, which we hold depoſited in the ſecret receſſes of our ſouls: none can take from us the conſolations of the Holy Ghoſt, which flow in upon the heart, and abundantly compenſate for the loſs of frail and tranſitory advantages. I know that the ſincere Chriſtian, when under affliction, may be ſenſibly affected; he may ſhed tears over his misfortunes; for religion does not extinguiſh the feelings of nature: but his heart diſavows ſuch weakneſs; and an heroic effort of reſignation converts thoſe natural tears into tears of compunction and piety. Nay more, the true ſervant of Jeſus rejoices

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in tribulation; conſiders ſufferings as ſo many marks of the divine goodneſs towards him, as the features which form his reſemblance with his Redeemer, as the pledges of his future felicity, his titles to immortal glory: conſequently, to give into dejection and deſpondency; to murmur at the works of Providence; to complain of the courſe of labour and pain which is ſet before us, is an argument that we want faith and hope in the promiſes of Jeſus.

II. I may here put you in mind, in the ſecond place, that, without ſtrength and reſolution, you cannot comply with any of the injunctions of the Goſpel. If, therefore, you are too weak to carry, with a ſilent acquieſcence to the divine will, thoſe croſſes which Providence hath laid upon your ſhoulders, you muſt be likewiſe too weak to diſcharge every individual duty of a Chriſtian life. You muſt make many vigorous efforts before you can forgive injuries, perform deeds of goodneſs to your bittereſt enemies, conceal

conceal the vices of thoſe who endeavour to depreciate your virtues. Much violence muſt you do to yourſelves, in order to keep your hearts diſengaged from a world which preſents to you ſo many attractions; to fly from the embraces of thoſe criminal pleaſures, to which all your propenſities ſo naturally and ſo forcibly tend; to preſerve your virtue pure amidſt the contagion of the world; to bear up againſt the torrent of human manners, cuſtoms, and faſhions, which otherwiſe would carry you down the ſtream to everlaſting perdition. Can you, without a generous fortitude of mind, continue to be humble in proſperity, poor in ſpirit, amidſt a profuſion of earthly poſſeſſions? Without violence can you quell your riſing paſſions; ſtifle in the bud your criminal deſires; guard your imaginations againſt dangerous and impure fancies; reſtrain within the boundaries marked out by the laws of God, a heart which ſtruggles continually for a deſtructive liberty and independence?

dependence? Examine each precept of the Evangelical Law, and you will not find one but what requires fortitude in thoſe who comply with it. *The kingdom of Heaven ſuffereth violence, and the violent bear it away.* (Mat. xi.) The Church of Chriſt upon earth is deſcribed to us, in the ſacred Scriptures, under the images, of *a vineyard*, in which we muſt bear the burthen and the heat of the day; of a *field of battle*, in which *our wreſtling is not* only *againſt fleſh and blood, but againſt principalities and powers, againſt the rulers of this world of darkneſs:* (Eph. c. vi.) and we are aſſured, that we cannot come off victorious from this conteſt, unleſs we take unto ourſelves *the armour of God, the ſhield of faith, the helmet of ſalvation, and the ſword of the ſpirit.* To determine, therefore, to indulge our weakneſs, and to ſhun whatever is painful to fleſh and blood, is to declare, that the Goſpel of Jeſus is not our rule, and to renounce all title to that eternal inheri-

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tance which it offers as the reward of our labours.

III. Suppoſing, moreover, that our ſituation be ever ſo diſtreſſing, we ſhould always nouriſh in our ſouls this juſt confidence in the goodneſs of our God; —a confidence ſupported by the comfortable aſſurance in the words of my text, that he will never ſuffer us to be tried, afflicted, or tempted, above our ſtrength. He diſtributes his chaſtiſements, as well as his favours, with due weight and meaſure. When he ſtrikes, it is not his aim to deſtroy, but to purify and to ſave us. He chaſtiſes with the tenderneſs of a loving parent, not with the rigour of an inexorable judge. The ſame hand which ſtrikes, ſupports us under the ſtroke. The hand which makes the wound, pours into it the oil of conſolation, mitigates the pain, and adminiſters the healing balſam. He knows well the temper of our hearts, and the meaſure of our force; and, conſequently, as his deſign in ſending

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us afflictions is to promote our real intereſts, he tempers his ſeverities with ſuch wiſdom, that we may neither loſe the occaſion of accumulating the merit of patience, nor be utterly ſubdued and broken by ſufferings too ponderous for the ſtrength of our minds.

Oh! my beloved friends, what other deſign can he have in mingling ſo much bitterneſs with the ſweets of life, but to facilitate for us the way to happineſs? Is he ſo cruel as to take delight in the diſtreſſes of his creatures? Is he a barbarous tyrant, who cements the edifice of his own greatneſs with the tears and blood of his ſubjects? Is he a jealous and peeviſh maſter, who can taſte no pleaſure if thoſe who depend on him have any ſhare in his ſatisfactions? Does he reſemble thoſe Deities whom ſuperſtition figured to itſelf, who delighted to ſee their altars ſmoaking with human blood? Cannot our God be happy without our ſufferings, ſighs, and tears? Undoubtedly he can. It is then for our ſakes that he

he chaſtiſes and puniſhes. He does violence to his own tenderneſs, when he ſends us tribulations. But, as he loves us, not with a blind, miſguided fondneſs, but with that prudent affection which prefers what is moſt ſalutary for us, to that which may give preſent ſatisfaction, he chooſes to let us ſuffer, knowing that *our preſent tribulation, which is momentary and light, worketh for us above meaſure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory.* (2 Cor. c. iv.)

He acts like a humane and tender-hearted phyſician, who is touched with commiſeration at the cries and pains of his patient, but nevertheleſs proceeds to make the inciſion, and cuts to the very root of all that is corrupted and mortified in the wound. Never is our God more ſweet and beneficent, than when he ſeems to be the moſt ſevere. Truly, my friends, afflictions muſt be uſeful; they muſt be neceſſary for us, ſince the Father of mercies, and God of all conſola-

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tion, can prevail on himſelf to ſuffer us to be afflicted.

We read in the book of Geneſis, that Joſeph, being exalted to the firſt dignities in Egypt, at the ſight of his brothers, who came to purchaſe corn in that country, could ſcarcely contain himſelf for joy and tenderneſs. While he affected to ſpeak to them in harſh and ſevere terms, and pretended to have no knowledge of them, the affectionate tear ſtarted ſpontaneous from his eye, and his bowels were moved with compaſſion. *He ſpake to them harſhly, as to ſtrangers....and turned himſelf aſide, and wept.* (Gen. c. xlii.) In this, as in many other parts of his conduct, Joſeph was an image of our Redeemer. In the time of our affliction, Jeſus ſeems not to acknowledge us for his friends and brethren; he treats us with ſourneſs and ſeverity: but ſoon, very ſoon, his tenderneſs breaks forth. The aſſumed character is not long ſupported: ſuch conſtraint is painful to his love. Quickly his graces and conſolations

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ſoothe our anguiſh, calm our troubled ſpirits, and make it ſweet to have ſuffered for him, of whoſe goodneſs we experience ſo many inſtances. Judge then, now, whether afflictions, diſtributed by his friendly and affectionate hand, can ever exceed the meaſure of our ſtrength.

No longer, therefore, muſt our natural weakneſs be alledged as the excuſe of our murmurings and impatience, ſince it is evident that they are derived from the corruption of our hearts. Tender and delicate virgins have heretofore defied the elaborate cruelty of the moſt inhuman tyrants: aged men, bending under the weight of years and infirmities, have felt their youth renewed, as that of the eagle, when ſtretched out on a bed of tortures, and in all the ſtages of a long and excruciating martyrdom. What talk you of weakneſs? It is your weakneſs that muſt reflect honour and dignity on the Religion of Chriſt Jeſus. Becauſe you are weak, he hath choſen to ſhow forth in

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you the triumphs of his grace over all the feelings of human nature. If you enter into the deſigns of his wiſdom and goodneſs, the weakneſs which you make the excuſe of your impatience, will be itſelf the ſolace of your pains.

In the days of tribulation, you will not wiſh for that pride of reaſon which conſoles its diſtreſſes by the vain glory of braving calamity; you will not aſk for that inſenſibility of heart which is callous to misfortune, or deſpiſes all the evils of life. No: you will be content with your own feeble and timid diſpoſition, with that tenderneſs of heart which is ſo ſuſceptible of diſtreſs: but you will beg of the Lord Jeſus to grant you a proportionate ſupply of his conſolations and graces. Knowing that *the grace of God is ſufficient* for you, and that *power is made perfect in infirmity*, you will glory with St. Paul in your *infirmities, that the power of Chriſt may dwell in you;* (2 Cor. c. xii.) and purſue your way through ſurround-

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ing troubles with a calm and ſteady ſtep; fixing your longing eyes on the joys and glories of a future life, which ſhall be your immortal recompence.

END OF THE THIRD VOLUME.

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